



THE  
CORRESPONDENCE  
OF  
THEODOSIUS AND CONSTANTIA.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

CONTAINING

THEIR CORRESPONDENCE AFTER SHE HAD TAKEN THE VEIL.

LETTER I,  
THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.



HE efforts which a mind in trouble makes to regain it's lost peace, like those glances of the sun that struggle through opposing clouds, are delightful to all beholders. When my Constantia rose above that gloom of sorrow, which her too apprehensive heart had thrown around her; when I saw her eye brighten, and her elegant but dejected features assume the beautiful form in which Nature had moulded them; I should have felt the pleasure of a christian, had I not once been Theodosius.

Amiable mourner! let us now forget the name which you have so long remembered with anguish, and which you could not pronounce without trembling, when you affectingly told Theodosius that you believed him to be no more. I wept, my Constantia; but my concern arose not from a sense of your guilt, but of your sufferings. Those tears, indeed, fell from the eyes of Theodosius, and in them the confessor had no part. The powers of memory and reflection were, in one moment,

presented with every scene of distress and tenderness which our unhappy loves had produced. And when I considered myself as the unfortunate cause of your long, your unmerited sufferings, I felt, in one painful minute, what Constantia had endured for years. Perhaps, too, your unequalled fidelity and unaltered love, while they flattered my heart, brought it back a moment to the world. But my guardian spirit whispered me that I had made a higher choice, and reminded me that the duties I owed you were those of a spiritual director, from whom you were to receive consolation and instruction. But, before I proceed to the farther discharge of those duties, let me intreat you to forgive—forgive me, suffering innocence, for being the unhappy, though involuntary instrument of your many miseries!—Five uncheerful years, my Constantia! how has your gentle heart supported itself during that melancholy period? How has it sustained those cruel apprehensions which, in confession, shook your frame? The reflection of what you must have endured for me, as it then wrung my soul with anguish, yet clouds it with sorrow, and has power to disturb the serenity of a mind, which I trust hath been visited by the peace of God.

But

But I should be still more disconsolate, were I not well assured that your present happiness will be in proportion to your former sufferings, and that the difficult ways through which you walked have at last conveyed you to the mansions of peace.

Such, Constantia, is the lot of human life. The road to happiness is seldom strewn with flowers: nor, perhaps, ought it to be so; as we should, in that case, be inclined to take our *passage* for our *port*, and while we enjoyed the manna, we might neglect the promised land.

I am, however, of a different opinion from most men, with regard to moral and natural evils. They derive them from the hand of Providence, and charge the consequences of human passions, follies, and vices, upon the Divine administration. Would this be proper for a person who was labouring under diseases that are the natural and inevitable effects of intemperance? Can those pains which the sufferer has consciously and voluntarily brought upon himself, be deemed the visitation of God? Would not this be to *charge God foolishly*? And if this were admitted, with what propriety could we say of that Divine Being, that *he does not willingly afflict his creatures*? With regard to this doctrine, my Constantia, it is of consequence that you should be rightly informed, because *from mistaken apprehensions of Providence proceed almost all the errors of religious faith*. But most dangerous to ourselves, and most injurious to the Deity, are those opinions which magnify his despotism at the expence of his benevolence. Harken not to such opinions, Constantia: God cannot be the minister of evil.

Our sufferings, natural and moral, are the consequence of that freedom of will, which is the very essence of our moral powers, and without which we should be mere machines, incapable of all virtue. There are, indeed, some natural evils, which to incur or avoid depends not on ourselves, because they come not within the æconomy of reason. But of these we partake only in common with mankind; and as in the dispensation of some of them we can perceive that Providence had wise and gracious purposes, so we may fairly

infer that those whose final causes we cannot apprehend, have their origin in the same universal benevolence.

It is, I think, generally understood, as a doctrine founded upon revelation, that there are such things as divine inflictions even in this life. No doubt there *may be* such, and there *may be* seasons obtrusive to the eye of Providence, when it is good for us to be afflicted. We *may be* summoned by calamity from the pursuit of pleasure; and though we cannot perceive the hand, the writing *may be* divine.

But I believe that this interposition of the Supreme Power is very rare. Nay, I will own to my Constantia, that my faith in this doctrine is, at best, but diabolical; for while I *believe I tremble*. Will God do evil that good may come? Is it necessary? Can Almighty Power be limited to the use of means?

I will, moreover, warn you of the evils that may be derived from this doctrine. It may prompt us to vain comparisons and uncharitable constructions: when we behold the calamities of others, we may be inclined to trace the finger of God where it has not been; and when we tacitly refer to our own condition, we may impute our exemption from evil to that integrity whereof we ought not to boast.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, present inflictions were more visible, because more necessary: for what other restraint was there upon the moral actions of mankind? When the great sanctions of Christianity were set forth, those restraints became inconsiderable, and were totally absorbed in the interests of the new system. *Old things passed away! Behold! all things became new.*

But *we are too apt to mix our religion, and to incorporate the divinity of the Old Testament with that of the New*. The moral law, indeed, still remains in force, because its tendency was everlasting; but when God saw fit to enter into a new covenant with man, the dispensations of his providence were altered, and made agreeable to it. Thus, though under the old law it might be necessary for the Divine Power to *chasten whom he loved*, yet that measure could be no longer expedient, when the hopes and fears of mankind were appealed to by the sanctions of immortality.

It is of great importance to you, Constantia,

Constantia, to form a right idea of your Creator, and to *know in whom you have believed*. To assist you in this respect, will be one of the first endeavours of Father

FRANCIS.

## LETTER II.

### CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

**M**Y sorrows for Theodosius are no more; he lives, and Constantia is happy. If you would not have me remember my sufferings, forget them yourself; for nothing now could make the reflection of them painful to me but their affecting my revered father.

Gracious Providence! and have I at length found a father? Has Heaven granted what Nature refused? She gave me, indeed, a father; but he forgot the name; or, he remembered the name and the authority, but forgot the duties of the alliance. Do I err? Then instruct me, my holy guide; instruct me to revere the man who banished Theodosius, and imbibed, without cause, the moments of her whom he had brought into being. But I will revere him, for he was kind at last, and permitted me to retire to this asylum of peace. Whatever were his motives, I will revere him; for have I not here found the only comfort I was capable of? Am I not sure that Theodosius lives? Without that conviction (I own my weakness) I should have been unhappy within these holy walls. The exercises of devotion I pursued with equal assiduity before I entered upon the conventual life; but my prayers were the heavy sacrifices of sorrow and contrition. I was alike a stranger to the serenity of peace, and to the comfort of hope. It was not in the power of conscious penitence to set my heart at ease, whenever the painful thought presented itself, that my cowardly acquiescence in the will of a father had been death to the most valuable and most amiable of men. Pitying Heaven has at length undeceived me, and at once restored to my eyes those dear lamented fugitives, Theodosius and Happiness; both changed, indeed, but both improved by the change. The pleasure I enjoyed in the company of the elegant and lively Theodosius, was gay, sprightly,

and animated, like himself: with him it departed and returned; and my heart was alternately delighted and depressed. Very different is the satisfaction I now feel: it is serene and peaceful, like Father Francis. My mind is collected, and my spirits are reposed. No longer agitated with the anxieties and impatience of hopes that terminate here; my eye is fixed on that distant, invariable object of happiness, on which time or chance can have no influence.

Ye holy retreats! ye venerable ailes! do I owe this peace to you? No, not to you: for methinks I have seen in your regions the gloom of discontent. Is it not, my pious Father, from a quiet conscience that I derive this repose? I should not, indeed, have felt it before I entered this convent, but I should not then have known that Theodosius was still in being.

Do not think, however, that I rejoice not in my situation. I do rejoice in it: but my joy arises, as I apprehend, from a disburdened mind. The sudden change from painful apprehension to the certainty of confirmed wishes, was attended with a transport, the effects of which I still feel. But will not these effects last? Surely they will. O my friend! what tears of joy have I shed over that first welcome letter, which informed me that *Theodosius was still alive!*

But do I not forget that I am addressing myself to the venerable Francis? Pardon me! I had indeed forgot, till on re-perusing that ever-dear letter, I beheld the holy name at the bottom. Yes, delightful letter! sweet messenger of peace! Thou informest me that I must consider Theodosius still as dead. Ha! dead, didst thou say? Theodosius is still alive. Didst not thou say that, too? Equivocating letter! be gone into my bosom; but presume not *there* to say that Theodosius is dead.

Heavens! what rambling is this? Whither has my unguided pen betrayed me! Once more forgive me, my revered father.

I thank you for the comfort, as well as for the information which your last letter afforded me. You have placed the Eternal Providence in a light the most amiable and new, at least to me. I had always, hitherto, looked upon that power as the inflicter of temporary evils, and considered both private and public calamities as his judgments.

But

But you have now made me of a different opinion; and I entirely agree with you, that temporary rewards and punishments are superseded by the sanctions of the Christian religion. Nevertheless, I am still of opinion, that God may occasionally interpose, by the infliction of evil, to save a wretch who is thoughtlessly or obstinately halting to destruction; but, with you, I apprehend that such dispensations are very rare, and am, for the reasons you mention, almost afraid to believe them.

One thought, however, occurs to me on this occasion, which I shall take the liberty to mention, in consequence of the invitation you have given me to express my sentiments without reserve.

We are so entirely different in our powers and passions, and the circumstances of sin and temptation are so extremely various, that though the Almighty might in general leave it to the sanctions of religion alone to influence the actions of men, yet possibly he might (so to term it) reserve a discretionary power, to bring proper objects by afflictions to their duty.

But though the Creator of the universe can in no sense be the author of evil, it cannot be doubted, I apprehend, that he may and frequently does bring good out of evil. Of this the story of Joseph is, in all its circumstances, a remarkable proof. I cannot suppose, neither would you have me believe, that God inspired the brethren of Joseph with envy, that they might sell him into Egypt? yet, what glorious advantages did the Almighty Providence bring out of that event!

And has he not, (for he regards the humblest of his creatures) has he not for me turned the path of sorrow towards the harbour of peace? I will believe it, lest I should prove ungrateful. Pray for me, and instruct me. Adieu!

CONSTANCE.

### LETTER III.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

**G**OOD sense, Constantia, makes better comments than learning; and I find that to propose my opinions to you will be of advantage to myself.

But do you not err, my amiable

friend, and is there not some acrimony in your language, when you speak of your natural father? It must not be. The duties of parents and children are indeed reciprocal: but the unnatural parent cannot acquit the child of its duty, any more than the undutiful child can acquit the parent of his natural obligations. Both these, however, are to be understood as secondary to the great duties we owe ourselves. A child ought no more to embrace misery than vice, to oblige a parent; and a parent is under no obligation to forfeit his own happiness for the gratification of a child. But, under all circumstances, that respect which is due to a parent still subsists; and when Constantia reflects on this, she cannot withhold that respect. Pity your father, Constantia; pray for your father. *If the god of this world hath blinded his eyes*, fervently pray for him in the words of Saint David: 'O God, lighten his eyes, that he sleep not the sleep of death!' He bears no uncommon marks of guilt or infamy: his foible is the love of money; a passion which of all others is the most difficult to guard against, because it increases by imperceptible degrees; and when it has once got entire possession of the heart, I believe there is no remedy for it. Many liberal men have become covetous, but I never knew one covetous man who became liberal: so easy is it, in every instance, to deviate from virtue to vice; and so hard, in that particular case, to rise from vice to virtue. Let us then consider your father rather as an object of compassion, and by no means forget to offer up our prayers for him. Who knows whether Heaven may not listen to the voice of supplicating innocence, and be overcome by the intreaties of filial piety? Would it not throw a new glory around the brows of Constantia should her father be restored to virtue by her prayers?

You are in the right, Constantia, to ascribe your present happiness to peace of conscience; for that is the foundation of all moral and religious comfort. Without that, the hallowed walls of a cloister would be hung with horrors, and the gloomy retreats of a convent would administer melancholy to the mind. It is that alone which gives serenity to our devotion, and enables us properly to communicate with God. It is that which the apostle of the Gen- tiles,

files, in his Second Letter to the converts of Corinth and other parts of Achaia, offered to their consideration, to take off that concern and sorrow which they must have felt for the persecutions which he and the rest of his fellow-labourers had undergone in their travels through Asia. The confidence of the conscious mind, he informs them, in every painful, every trying calamity, had still supported them. 'Nay,' continues he, 'we can even rejoice in our distresses, and our rejoicing is this, *the testimony of our conscience.*'

If we should enquire into the design of Providence in thus furnishing us with this silent inspector, we should find, that in this case, as well as in all others, our God has acted from the dictates of infinite goodness. Had we been without this ever-active censor, what would have been the consequence? Too apt we are, even now, to slight the admonitions of it, and should we not still more easily have fallen a prey to temptation, had there been no internal monitor to inform us that 'this should not be done?' Would not vice have found many more votaries, when no meeting remonstrance checked it, and no painful reflection followed? It is evident, then, that conscience was stationed in the human mind by the *Giver of all good gifts*; and that, for the aid of virtue, and for the support of reason, *it came down from the Father of lights*. Is not this, Constantia, our guardian angel, who warns us against the most dangerous of all enemies, the enemies of our salvation? By this friendly spy we are informed of, and even foresee, their attacks; and happy it is for us that we are thus assisted. The insinuations of vice, after all, are too often successful, and her arts prevail against the force of conviction. Nor, indeed, should we consider all the stratagems she makes use of, would there be any room to wonder at her success. Does she not assume the characters of pleasure, knowledge, virtue; nay, and of religion too: her great patron being conscious that he shall be most successful in his works of darkness, when he assumes the appearance of an angel of light? Does not the most profligate licentiousness call itself Pleasure? Does not mole-eyed infidelity claim the titles of Knowledge and Philosophy? Has not Religion been asserted by blood-thirsty Zeal. And

has not fanatick Hypocrisy likewise assumed her banner, and lifted up her voice in the streets? O conscience! thou sacred guardian of rational virtue and religious truth, let loose thy vengeance upon these monsters; these pests of society, and emissaries of vice!

Do not you perceive, my Constantia, in this dispensation of Providence, the perfection of wisdom and goodness? There are a thousand vices, a thousand enormities, which have nothing to fear from any human tribunal, but are checked and restrained by this mental Judge.

That peace which you imputed to a disburdened mind, led me naturally into these sentiments. 'Will that peace,' you ask, 'continue?' Doubt not that it will. It is *that peace which the world cannot give*; and which, therefore, the world cannot take away. That happiness which is derived from a pleasing concurrence of earthly events, will vanish when Fortune reverses her wheel; the same chance which reared the brittle fabrick of felicity may demolish it in a moment; but the religious satisfaction, if rightly founded, cannot be overthrown.

I am well assured, Constantia, that you will find your happiness increased by the repeated exercises of devotion. It is impossible that the intercourse we have with Infinite Goodness should not be attended with present advantages.

But ever let it be your care, my amiable friend, that your devotion be rational and serene. Let it not rise upon the wings of passion, but be offered up with a subdued and dispassionate decency. Let your mind be clear and composed when you address yourself to your God, lest by any means you should speak unadvisedly to the Father of wisdom.

Wander not, if I tell you that all your passions should not be absorbed in heaven. Rational devotion is not founded in the glowing ardours of human sensibility; the more it partakes of these, the more remote it will be from that spiritual and intellectual worship which is paid to the Father of lights by superior natures. The adoration of passion is blind and impulsive; that of reason is clear and intelligent. By this worship the Deity is rationally honoured, by that he is implicitly adored.

For these reasons, Constantia, I would not recommend to you those books of

flaming devotion, which, while they kindle the heart, confuse the head, and turn sober piety into wild enthusiasm. If the authors of such books meant to serve religion, they were mistaken; for true piety differs as much from such enthusiastick ravings, as the cheerful temper of serene health from the delirious wildness of a fever. *God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* Whatever is spiritual is dispassionate. Such is God himself, and such ought to be the worship we offer him.

Adieu, my Constantia! May God keep you in his protection, and enlighten you by his grace.

FRANCIS.

#### LETTER IV.

##### CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

**T**HEODOSIUS is not dead. The polite Theodosius still lives in the venerable Francis. When I received your last letter, my hand trembled, and my heart shrunk. Every idle, every wild expression, every effusion of vain imagination and uncorrected passion, that had dropped from my pen when I wrote to you, rose up and reproached me before your seal was broken. While I read the first period of your letter, I frequently took my eye from the paper, and endeavoured to recollect the contents of my own. With fear and apprehension I proceeded from line to line; but when I found that you had overlooked many of my foibles, and touched the rest with so delicate, so indulgent a hand—O my paternal friend! what floods of tender sorrow fell from the eyes of your Constantia! Surely, the kindness of those whom we revere, and are conscious of having offended, is more cruel than their severity could be. The heart would oppose itself against severe treatment, and call in pride to its aid: but against the force of kindness there is no shield.

In what an amiable light do you represent that Goodness which brought us into being! Conscience was undoubtedly one of his gracious gifts. That moral inspector, whose suggestions so lately gave me pain, is now the principal author of my happiness; and I find that conscience is not more severe as an

enemy, than kind as a friend. Was it not this that supported the sufferer of Uzz, and was he not animated by the suffrage of Conscience, when he wished that man might be permitted to *plead his cause with God.* If I am mistaken, correct me; my guide, my father, and my friend!

CONSTANCE.

#### LETTER V.

##### THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

**I** Am pleased with your reference to the book of Job, as it gives me an opportunity to tell you with what delight I have always read that beautiful dramatick poem. The ingenious author of it had sacrificed to truth and nature. His character of the pious sufferer, however exalted, is not exaggerated by any unnatural strokes. While he is not permitted to fall into impious exclamation against the decrees of Providence, he complains of his distress with the sensibility of a man to whom *wearisome nights were appointed.* Hence the afflicted patriarch sometimes alarms us with passionate wishes for death, and sometimes awakens our compassion with affecting sighs for his former happiness.

In the passage you have referred to, we are presented with another turn of mind. 'I am sensible,' says he, 'of the innocence of my life. I have done no wrong, neither has any violence been found in my hands; and yet my face is deformed with weeping, and the shadow of death frowns upon my eye-brows. Yet, thus circumstanced, and thus innocent, my prayer surely may be heard. Behold, even now my witness is in Heaven, and my Advocate is in the realms of the highest. My friends continually deride me; but my tears plead silently with God. O that a man might plead his cause with God, even as the son of man pleadeth the cause of his friend!' In another of his speeches there is a passage much to the same purpose. *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat, I would order my cause before him!*

There is no doubt, Constantia, that

in

in these sentiments the patriarch was animated by the suffrage of conscience. And there is not a passage in his whole story that is fraught with more important instruction: for it may teach us that, under all the circumstances of human calamity, our only refuge is in the Eternal Providence; and that our peace must be derived from that approving conscience which may encourage us to refer our cause to God. From what other source can we, in such circumstances, look for happiness? Dependent beings have it not to bestow. Were man in his social nature a more exalted creature, the dispensation of peace would not be in his power. He could not remove from others those evils to which he should himself be exposed, nor brighten the prospects of futurity, whither his influence cannot reach.

Man, as being circumscribed in his nature, and subject to events which he cannot command, must, if left to himself, fluctuate in uncertainty, and struggle with disappointment; he, therefore, that would hope with confidence, and enjoy with security, must have a resource which time and chance cannot effect. This can only be in that independent Being, in whose hands are the *issues of life and death*.

Shall we trust to human power? *The strength of man is but as the grass of the field, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower that fadeth.* Shall we trust to human riches? *Riches profit not in the day of wrath.* Shall we trust to human wisdom? *Wisdom herself is the daughter of affliction.* Shall we trust to human friendship? *In the day of adversity there is no hope in man.* Can power preclude the attacks of misfortune? Can riches delight in the hour of mourning? Can wisdom guard against the stratagems of chance? Has friendship a charm for the languor of sickness? How feeble would these supports prove, Constantia, in the trying hour of adversity; or in those moments of awful suspense, when we expect the *everlasting doors* of futurity shall be thrown open, and we shall *enter in*!

Better founded, my friend, will be the supports of that man who refers his cause to God, and whose conscience encourages him to rely on the eternal Providence. He depends on a power that is superior to all events; on the riches

of divine goodness, which can never be exhausted; on that wisdom which can see the remotest consequences of things; and on that friendship which no caprice can change. The man of Uzz had the strongest conviction of this truth: for experience had taught him that human greatness was *lighter than vanity itself*; that riches did actually *make themselves wings and flee away*; that the wisdom of man was *little more than that of the wild ass's colt*; and that his friendship was scarce in proportion to his wisdom. His three friends, whose knowledge should have directed, and whose affection should have soothed him, he often heard, with reasonable impatience, prescribing resolutions to which human nature was not equal, endeavouring to deprive him of his greatest support, the consciousness of his integrity, and sharpening his pains by mortifying reflections. Then it was that, destitute of all earthly consolation, he appealed to Heaven, and even wished that by a personal communication with the Supreme Power, he might be permitted to lay his cause before him.

It is our happiness, Constantia, that this appeal of the patriarch is not necessary for us. The Christian covenant, gracious in every dispensation, has given us *an Advocate with the Father*, who shall plead our cause: an Advocate who knoweth well the frailties of human nature, and whose intercession can never be ineffectual. Let us, my friend, make ourselves acceptable to him; let us lay hold of those terms of redemption which he has procured for us, and our eternal interests will be established on a sure foundation.

You, my Constantia, are among those that have *chosen this good part*; you have laboured for the bread of immortality, and have left that *which perisheth* to the numbers who *disquiet themselves in vain*. Let such be pitied, my friend, not despised; for spiritual pride has its origin in such contempt, and it is one of the many unchristian qualities of blind enthusiasm: nay, you should even watch over your pity; for there is a kind of pity that is allied to contempt.

Born with the gentlest heart, and ever accustomed to adore, with the purest piety, the Author of your being, your religion is become habitual, and you know not the difficulty with which a

Heart long devoted to vice must be reformed.

Man, though born with faculties to reach through the depths of time, and powers to flourish through the ages of eternity, seldom looks beyond the present hour, or is affected but by present objects. The immortal soul, confined to this mansion of earth, becomes enamoured of her habitation, and in time persuades herself that *here she has a delight to dwell*. Hence she is solicitous how she may repair the tottering wall, and support the frail fabrick. Yet surely this attachment is strange, Constantia; since, notwithstanding her solicitude for its preservation, this frame will soon fall, and very soon moulder into its native earth. Yet a little while, and every breast that is now warm with hope, and busy with design, shall drop into the cold and senseless grave. The eye that is reading this page shall be closed in darkness, and the hand that writes it shall crumble into dust!

In that hour when the immortal spirit shall exchange this transient being for the allotments of eternity! in that awful hour, Constantia, what shall support us? Nothing, but the consciousness of a well-conducted life. That divine confidence in the Father of nature; that peace of God which passeth all understanding; that serene affiance; that exalted repose of soul: these are the fruits of a life long resigned to God, and directed by religion. Yet surely these are well worth our transient labours: if these are not secured, we have lived and we have toiled in vain; we have given our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not.

Live, my Constantia, supported by that gracious Power whom you serve, supported by his providence, and enlightened by his grace.

FRANCIS.

## LETTER VI.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

**W**ELCOME, sweet PEACE OF CONSCIENCE! Lovely stranger! Daughter of religious duty, welcome! How heavy was my heart, how painful were my hours in thy absence! How gloomy and dissatisfied! With what

anxiety and uneasiness did I arise from the most comfortable of all duties, the holy sacrifice of prayer! The incense seemed to rise unacceptably. My prayers were feeble; they were unable to reach the throne of the Almighty, and returned, but not with happiness, to my own bosom. To the possession of thee, sweet PEACE, what are riches and honours? What were the wealth of kingdoms, the acquisition of worlds, purchased at thy expence?

O my paternal friend, how forcible is truth, divine truth! With what pleasing conviction did every ray of it, that illumined your last letter, shine upon my heart! How poor did the interests, the pleasures of this world appear, when compared with the pure, the peaceable wisdom, that cometh from above!

FATHER of lights, ever grant me this wisdom! Let the prayers of my father and my friend co-operate with my own, at thy eternal throne, and procure for me the blessed influences of thy sacred Spirit!

This, my venerable guide, is the substance of my daily prayer, which, since I received your instructions, I have repeated with greater assiduity. I have ever been convinced, that the Divine concurrence was necessary to assist us in the discharge of our duty, as well as to direct us in the knowledge of it; but that emphatical prayer which concludes your letters, 'that the eternal Providence would enlighten me with his grace,' has given new force to my convictions.

I will not prescribe to you the subject of your letters. I shall listen with pleasure and attention to your instructions, to whatever point of duty or of doctrine they may be directed; but allow me to wish, my revered friend, that on this important doctrine of Grace I may soon receive your valuable observations.

Possibly this divine dispensation may be necessary in a greater or in a less degree than I suppose it to be. I have received different accounts of it from the professors of our holy faith, but I think that all of them have concluded it to be necessary for us; though in what measure it was necessary, they have not agreed.

It is generally understood, that this Divine Grace is the consequential privilege of Christianity, purchased for us by

by him who died for our redemption; yet I have sometimes thought that the author of the Book of Psalms prayed for this enlightening grace, in that passage which you have quoted in one of your letters, *'My God, lighten my eyes, that I sleep not the sleep of death.'*

With respect to this opinion, as well as to the necessity or expedience of divine grace, and the degree in which it is dispensed, I hope for your kind instructions.

Those books of flaming devotion, which you have advised me not to read, I own I have hitherto been too fond of. Particularly since I entered upon the conventual life, I have been much conversant in such books. They were recommended to me by my lady abbess, who is a good woman; but her devotion seems not to be of that serene and temperate kind which you describe and approve. She is unequal in her religious deportment, being sometimes elevated, but more frequently depressed.

What do I not owe to you, my father, for procuring me the book of God in a language I understand? Agreeably to your directions, I make that my principal study, and trust that it is able to make me wise unto salvation.

Never, I hope, in the heart of your Constantia, shall that spiritual pride you mention find a place. I am too sensible of their unhappy condition *'who live without God in the world'*, to look upon them with any other emotions than those of compassion. With the heart that is destitute of religious peace, my own has been a fellow-sufferer; and should I triumph in my comparative happiness or purity, should I thence derive any sentiments of contempt for others, the reflection would rather mortify than soothe me, since I should appear to despise in them what I myself had been.

The hour of prayer is at hand—I come; daughters of devotion, I join you—and now will I once more intreat the Author of life and death long to spare Theodosius, for the comfort and support of

CONSTANCE.

## LETTER VII.

### THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

I Intended to make the dispensation of grace the subject of a letter, and I thank you for putting me in a method of treating it.

Your first question is, whether this dispensation was only the consequential privilege of Christianity; or whether it was not also the privilege of Judaism.

The latter part of this proposition you infer from that poetical petition of the psalmist, *'My God, lighten my eyes,'* &c. Now, Constantia, it is obvious enough to suppose that the king of Israel might pray for the illumination of the Divine Spirit, as his son and successor prayed for wisdom, though under their system *there was no promise of the ordinary dispensations of grace.* It would be natural for a people who were *visited by God*, and beheld, on so many occasions, the interposition of his Providence, to apply to him for his assistance under the conflicts of religious duty. It would be still more natural for them *who sat in darkness*, to petition for that light, of which some emanations were communicated in the extraordinary influences of the Spirit, though, agreeably to the scheme of the eternal and unerring Providence, the perfection of it should not be displayed till the *fullness of time.*

This may be sufficient to answer your first question, which is rather curious than useful.

With respect to the necessity or expedience of the Divine Grace, I have much more to say. The philosophers of our system, who weigh every thing in the scale of natural obligation, or moral aptitude, exclaim against this doctrine of grace. *'If you admit the impulse of a superior agent, where,'* say they, *'is the moral agency of man? Besides, is it agreeable to the fitness of things that God should prescribe a law to man, to which his moral powers alone are not adequate? This,'* continue they, *'would be to make God an Egyptian task-master. The moral powers of man must be adequate to the duties appointed him, and the doctrine of grace is therefore superfluous.'*

At this avenue, which is opened by the Christian philosopher, rushes the philosopher of Nature. He takes up the argument where the other laid it down. *'You have very rightly observed, Sir,'* says he, *'that God would be an Egyptian task-master, if he gave us a law that we were unable to live up to. Such, I insist upon it, is the law that is said to be from him. —From him therefore it cannot be.'*

Thus,

Thus, Constantia, you see the consequence of philosophizing in religion.—Give up one redoubt to the enemy, and he turns our batteries against us. To both these ungracious opponents, I shall give a short answer. To the Christian sophist I say, that the powers of man may be inadequate to the law of religion, though its origin was from God; and to the philosopher of Nature I answer, that the law of religion may be from God, though the powers of man are inadequate to it. The same argument will prove both these points.

A perfect law might be given to imperfect beings without any impropriety: it might be given to make them exert to the utmost the powers of their nature, and strain to higher degrees of virtue for the high prize of their calling—it might be intended to encourage an useful emulation, by making still greater degrees of excellence attainable—it might be designed to prevent indifference and independance, which man would naturally have suffered to grow upon him, when secure, by his own power, of attaining to moral perfection, and of discharging every duty enjoined him. A dependance on the Almighty for assistance in the conduct of life is productive of many advantages: it prevents that pride and carelessness which are too often the effect of security and independance; it opens an intercourse with the Deity by prayer; which, though the most delightful part of religious duty, would become unnecessary the moment that the aid of Divine grace should be found to be so.

From these co-operating causes, Constantia, you see how expedient is the dispensation of grace. How necessary it is for us in our present state, we need not make appeals to reason, but to experience.

To be ignorant of the sacred truths of religion, and to be destitute of the communicable influences of God's Holy Spirit, has been always considered by good men as the most deplorable condition of human wretchedness. Hence we find it represented in the sacred writings by the terrible images of darkness and death. *Those, says the prophet, that sat in darkness have seen a great light, and they that were in the region and the shadow of death, on them hath the light shined.—Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and*

*Christ shall give thee light.—My God, lighten mine eyes that I sleep not in death.* This was the petition of that prince, whose devotion was so pure and exalted, that the Almighty himself bore testimony to his excellence in pronouncing him *a man after his own heart.* And could he, *the light of Israel*—could he, distinguished for his knowledge of the then revealed religion, could he, illumined with the spirit of prophecy, think it necessary to pray for the enlightening grace of Heaven, and should not we much more?—we, who cannot, like the prophet, boast any superior portion of the Divine Spirit, and who have yet, with him, the same propensities to evil.

On us, indeed, *the Sun of Righteousness hath shined.* To us is displayed a perfect knowledge of those saving truths, those exalted doctrines, that were then only seen in types and shadows. It is our happiness to know the perfect will of God, revealed by his Son, Jesus Christ. The sacred Scriptures contain every thing necessary to salvation. There every moral duty is clearly stated, and every point of faith sufficiently discovered. To these *fountains of light and immortality* we may apply without deception, for that knowledge which *leadeth us into all truth.*

Blessed be the gracious Author of our salvation! *the veil of partition* is now taken away; those types and figures, which were *the shadowings of good things to come*, are removed, and *we know what we worship.*

It is for us, then, on whom *the light hath shined*, to be willing, at least, to *rejoice in that light.* It is for us, with unwearied assiduity to study the holy Scriptures, *which are able to make us wise unto salvation.* Whatever attainments we make in science, if we neglect this, the only *true wisdom*, our knowledge and our industry are vain. Whatever skill, whatever prudence we possess in the œconomy of this life, if the acquisition has been made by the neglect of this knowledge, it is skill that darkens, and prudence that destroys.

The rude notices of natural reason alone can never be sufficient to direct us in every part of our conduct. Those lights, though useful and universal, are liable to be obscured by the passions, to be enfeebled by vice, or misled by

by error. The understanding may be made subservient to the heart, and employed in the defence of what we wish, rather than what we ought to do. The force of truth may be overcome by habit; and, like the heathen statue, we may fall down before an image of our own framing. It is essentially necessary, therefore, that we should have some certain rules of action, some plain directions laid down for our conduct, which can neither be perverted by sophistry, nor misconstrued by error.

Such, Constantia, is the necessity of that external information which has been ordinarily dispensed to us by the Spirit of God; which, while I have been attending to, I have not lost sight of my argument.

The same causes which concur to make the outward evidences of the Spirit of God so necessary for our information, render the internal aids of his Grace as necessary for our direction and support in the discharge of our duty.

To acquire a consummate knowledge of the holy Scriptures is not alone sufficient to conduct us to the *land of everlasting life*. These are the leading stars by which we must direct our course, but other means are necessary to guard us from the tempest above, and the shoals below. The ocean of life is treacherous and uncertain. Many latent dangers await the passenger, and he is frequently in the greatest peril when he thinks himself the most secure.

Shall I change the scene, and suppose that we have an earthly passage to the city *that is not made with hands*? Yet, in that case, how many circumstances of danger to the traveller does the allegory afford me! A thousand accidents concur to make us deviate from *the narrow way that leadeth to life*. We are on one side threatened by horrible precipices, on another invited by prospects of beauty: despair points out to us the length and difficulty of the journey, and weariness importunes us to seek the vallies of repose.

The object, indeed, at which we finally aim, would infinitely counterbalance every inconvenience. And *the sufferings of the present time* will bear no comparison *with the glory that shall be revealed among us*. But objects placed at a distance, however important, never strongly affect us: as in the attraction of bodies; if those with which

they sympathise be far removed, they will adhere to others more near, to which they have less relation.

Some portion of Divine Grace, some measure of God's Holy Spirit, is indispensably necessary for every Christian. Mere human wisdom, though assisted by the knowledge of the Divine Revelation, will not always be sufficient to support us in our duty. How often, with the conviction of truth upon us, are we insensibly drawn into the ways of error! How often, in the consciousness of determined integrity, are we betrayed into vice by the stratagems of temptation! Though we may in general be very sensible of our duty, yet we have not at all times the same capacity of attention, nor the same readiness of apprehension to distinguish good from evil. The faculties of the mind are sometimes vigorous, and sometimes languid. The will is frequently retained by idleness, or solicited by desire, without receiving any instructions from reason; and the œconomy of the soul is oftener in disorder than that of the body.

In such circumstances, Constantia, have we not need of some superior aid? Want we not the directive influences of the Spirit of Wisdom, to keep us in the narrow paths of duty? Can there be any doubt that the ordinary dispensations of Grace are necessary?

But in what degree, you ask, is this grace ordinarily dispensed? to which I must beg leave to answer, that *God giveth not his Spirit by measure*. It is enough for us to know what he hath declared, that *his Grace is sufficient for us*. It must be necessary in a greater or a less degree, in proportion to the different tempers, situations and circumstances of mankind: and to the prayers and endeavours of each a sufficiency thereof will be dispensed. To our prayers and endeavours, I say, it will be dispensed; agreeably to which we are told, that *our heavenly Father will give of his Holy Spirit to them that ask it in his Son's name*. And while we are informed that *it is God who worketh in us*, we are commanded to *work out our own salvation*. Thus, Constantia, a sufficiency of the Divine Grace is promised to our prayers—promised to co-operate with our endeavours. And it is thus, that the œconomy of grace interferes not with that freedom of will

on which all our merit, as rational creatures, is founded. Our prayers and endeavours are voluntary acts; and we are consequently as much at liberty to lay hold of the dispensation of Grace as of Redemption, and as much at liberty to reject it, to resist or to *quench* the Spirit.

Were not this the case, Constantia, were the dispensation of Grace entirely independent on our own will, the moral agency of man would be superseded, and the doctrine of rewards and punishments would be vain. If, according to the doctrine of fanatics, the Grace of God be an impulsive principle, partially bestowed, and actuating us as mere machines, then the Almighty has taken our salvation into his own hands, and rendered moral virtue an empty name.

But this doctrine will, on the conclusion, be found blasphemous to God, and injurious to mankind. For, if God be the sole agent of our salvation, to him it must be owing if any soul perisheth; and if moral virtue be vain, the flood-gates of vice may be thrown open, and the world be overwhelmed with the deluge.

But if God be the sole author of our salvation, and if his Grace be an impulsive principle which we cannot resist, then no soul shall perish; for we are expressly told that *God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*. If it should be replied, that some do perish; nay, that many go on in the broad way to destruction: then I answer, that God has not the power to do what he is willing to do. He is willing that none should perish; and yet you say that some do perish, therefore there are some whom he has it not in his power to save. Now God is all-powerful, consequently he must have dispensed with his power in that respect by making the salvation of man conditional. If we accept not the mercies of the Gospel on the terms that are offered to us, God himself can do no more for us—God himself cannot act inconsistently with his own laws. Every attribute of the supreme perfection must be perfect—Justice and truth are his essential attributes—his justice and his truth therefore must be perfect.

You see, my friend, how wretchedly founded is that fanatical doctrine, which represents the Grace of God as

an irresistible principle, acting unconditionally, and impelling men to salvation. You see what dishonour it would bring upon the Deity, what disorder amongst mankind, and how inconsistent it is with the sacred writings.

If, therefore, the Grace of God be a conditional, not an irresistible principle, it will, as I observed before, be dispensed only in a sufficient degree: that is, it will effectually co-operate with our own endeavours in working out our salvation. More than this we have no right to expect from the Grace of God. Infinite Wisdom will not do what is not necessary to be done. The extraordinary influences of the Spirit have ceased, because they are no longer requisite.

Saint Paul himself, in his First Epistle to the converts at Corinth, tells them, that the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit should cease, but that Charity, which was a moral grace of Christians, should still remain, in consequence of those ordinary dispensations of the Spirit, that should continue with the church.

Whatever, therefore, appears to exceed these ordinary influences of Grace, the raving flights of enthusiasm, and the rage of fanatical zeal; the sudden impulses of devotional rapture, and the wild reveries of Tartuffian dreamers; all these are the fruits of insane imagination, and cannot proceed from that pure and peaceable Spirit which cometh from the Father of Lights.

The office of that Spirit is to inform the mind with a right sense of it's duty, and to animate and encourage it in the discharge of it. In this light it is properly called by our Redeemer, that Comforter which should *lead us into all truth, and teach us all things*.

How much are those offices misrepresented by the followers of Calvin, and by enthusiasts of every denomination! What visionary communications, what suggestions of sick fancy, have those delirious dreamers imputed to the Spirit of wisdom! as if God would render vain that faculty of reason which characterizes man by his own image; and as if the enlightening Spirit of Grace would rather obscure than illumine the understanding; these unthinking men have charged upon the operations of that Spirit the most extravagant effects of wild insanity. Under the influence of imaginary calls, some have preached, and some have prophesied. The mechanick

chanick has forsaken his awl, and his wife her distaff, and with heads full of glorious visions, together they have issued into the streets and highways to publish the everlasting Gospel.

It will always be difficult for devout ignorance to distinguish between the suggestions of imagination, and the influences of the Divine Spirit. Unaccustomed to abstracted thinking, or even to draw conclusions from the most simple propositions, the ignorant are unable to form any judgment of that mode of inspiration, which should be most consistent with the wisdom of Providence. They consider not that it must be more agreeable to infinite knowledge to invigorate the nobler faculty of reason, and to bring the passions into subjection, than by inflaming them to weaken that faculty, and by so doing to put darkness for light. Hence all the waking dreams of blind enthusiasm are cherished and respected as the offspring of Grace; and the mistaken visionary ascribes to the Author of Reason, such impulses and communications as could only exist in a mind where reason was impotent.

But the delusions of innocent enthusiasm would hardly deserve attention, were they not sometimes productive of consequences that render that enthusiasm no longer innocent. From the belief of divine impulses, the flames of persecution have been lighted, and the altars of superstition have been adorned; the sanguinous have been prompted to indulge their natural thirst of blood, and the gloomy have forsaken the society of human creatures, and inhabited caves, and cells in solitary sanctity. This species of religious retirement I have ever condemned; but my objections do not affect the conventual life, for there is great difference between retiring to a cave in some unfrequented desert, and entering into a religious society\*. Many more than these have been the effects of mistaken impulses. The history of the church in every period abounds with them.

Yet how easy is it, upon reflection, to guard against these delusions! What is the end of Divine Grace? It is only to aid us in the knowledge and in the discharge

of our duty. Therefore, whatever impulse hath other tendency than these, it cannot be of God, because it is not agreeable to his wisdom to do what is superfluous. A sufficiency of his Grace is what alone he hath promised us, and what alone it is consistent with Infinite Wisdom to give. Will the Father of Lights amuse his creatures with dreams and reveries? Will he sport with their passions, depress and elevate, inflame and distract them? Will he not rather assist *such as call upon him faithfully*, to bring those passions into subjection; and to confirm in it's proper empire the nobler principle of reason? Is not such the mode of operation that the all-wise Creator would assign to his assisting Spirit? *The wisdom that cometh from above*, we are told, is *pure and peaceable*: such wisdom is congenial with our reason, which is a clear and steady principle; and therefore it must act in concurrence with that principle; at least, it's effects cannot be repugnant to it's conceptions.

Thus, Constantia, by the information of the revealed word, and by the use of that reason which God has given us that we may be able to understand his will, we learn the nature of such dispensations as his wisdom hath thought proper to communicate to us.

I have extended my observations on this subject farther than you desired, or might expect; because the doctrine of Grace is an important subject, and the right understanding of it may not only preserve us from many absurdities and indecencies in religious duty, but from many dangerous errors both in practice and belief. When once the heart gives itself up to blind fanaticism, we cannot tell to what attempts it may be seduced, or where the influences of unrestrained and (what will always be the consequence) of misdirected passions may lead us. When the imagination triumphs over reason, the œconomy of the mind is destroyed; and Confusion, with Insanity in her rear, approaches, and usurps the empire of the soul.

May every ministering spirit of heaven guard the peace of my Constantia! May her piety be uniformly rational

\* There is, indeed, as Father Francis observes, a difference between these two sorts of retirement; but, in the Editor's opinion, the difference lies only in the mode; for they are equally repugnant to the determinations of Providence, which has made the whole moral duty of man to consist in the social capacity of serving his fellow-creatures.

and calm! May the incense of her devotion rise from the altar of reason, the voluntary sacrifice of gratitude! May she ever *know whom she worships*, and remember that an intellectual Being requireth an intellectual adoration! In every act of worship, and in every point of duty, may she be constantly supported and directed by the pure and peaceable Spirit of Truth! By that Spirit may she be enlightened to discern those finer relations that exist between the Creator and the creature, undistinguished by the eye of human intelligence, and learn from thence not only what is due, but what is acceptable to God. Under every circumstance of life may she be happy in ease, or contented in resignation; and when the short thread of life is spun, when she enters upon the inheritance of immortality, may she receive the fulness of the blessings which Infinite Benevolence has in reserve for those *that honour him as he ought to be honoured*.

FRANCIS.

#### LETTER VIII.

##### CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

**H**OW beautiful does the religion of Christians appear, when beheld with the eye of reason! How amiable the benevolent Author of it! Surely, my revered friend, there is a secret delight in the investigation of divine truths, and the discovery of them affords the greatest of pleasures. Your most obliging letter on the subject of Grace, gave you, I presume, no less satisfaction in the writing, than it afforded me in the perusal; and I think I can discern, in the more animated passages of that letter, those pleasing sensations you felt when the light of religious truth shone the clearest to your eye. If I am not mistaken in this, and if your pleasure in writing that letter, were equal to that which I found in reading it, you have had a better reward than my gratitude can give you.

You have justified the scheme of Providence in the dispensation of Grace, against every objection that has been or can be brought against it. You have placed in a clear light the benevolent

purposes of the Father of Mercies in that dispensation, who has made man dependent on him for the assistance of his divine Spirit, only because he has a delight to give it, and because it must be the happiness and comfort of his creatures to receive it. It plainly appears from your account of it, that the oeconomy of grace interferes not with that freedom of will on which all moral goodness must be founded, and without which we could neither be capable of virtue nor vice, neither intitled to rewards, nor liable to punishment. It appears that the moral agency of man may be exercised in the application of the Divine Grace, and that he is at liberty either to apply or to reject it.

With respect to the degree in which it is dispensed, you have, no doubt, rightly observed, that as God will not do what is unnecessary, no more than a sufficiency of it will be granted to our prayers: and as to the mode of its operation, it is surely consistent with the wisdom that gave us reason for our direction, to render by his grace the efforts of that reason effectual, in subduing the passions, and reducing them to the obedience of his holy laws. By a rational worship, you have observed, in a former letter, that God is most honoured; when, from a due and dispassionate consideration of his benevolent works, we come, from a principle of gratitude, to offer him a *reasonable sacrifice*. This sacrifice would indeed be no longer reasonable, were we irresistibly impelled to offer it by the influences of a superior agency: we should then be the instruments of a worship paid to God, but we should not be the worshippers; and with what delight should the eternal Wisdom look upon our sacrifice, when conscious that it proceeded not from a voluntary discharge of duty, but was the inevitable consequence of his own agency? With what propriety could he say, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant*; when he himself has been the agent, and the servant no more than a machine in his hands? To suppose, then, that the Divine Grace is an irresistible principle, must be to *charge God foolishly*; and whatever reverence I have heretofore paid to those misdeeming enthusiasts who have this doctrine, I must now retract it, and shall, for the future,

future, rather pity them as mistaken, than respect them as inspired.

But I will own to you, my paternal friend, that I should not so easily have become the disciple of reason, had you made that faculty a dictator on it's own authority; when you only make it instrumental in the application of truths revealed, as that is, undoubtedly, the purpose for which it was given us, I cannot but agree with you in every conclusion you have made.

How shall I thank you for the repeated instances of your care and kindness, for those ardent wishes that glow in the last page of your letter, those prayers for your Constantia's happiness and safety? O may they be heard at the throne of everlasting mercy! and rise not unaccompanied with those daily offerings which the delights in making for the preservation of her friend. Adieu.

CONSTANCE.

#### LETTER IX.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

AS you were not displeased with my account of the dispensation of grace, I will now give you my thoughts on a duty, to the due discharge of which, that dispensation is promised. I have observed before, that, were the grace of God an unconditional and irresistible principle, our prayers would be superfluous. Had the almighty Providence formed an irreversible decree with respect to our salvation, or were he totally uninfluenced by any thing that we should do in order to obtain the aid of his Sacred Spirit, our acts of devotion would be as absurd as every other act of duty would be vain. Yet there are many, Constantia, who hold this doctrine; because the Christian covenant is called the covenant of grace, they annihilate the moral agency of man, and represent him as entirely passive in the accomplishment of his salvation. I have sufficiently exposed the errors of this unscriptural doctrine, and shall therefore proceed to consider prayer as one of *the means of grace*.

Our Saviour himself, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, (that is, for our deliverance

from eternal death; for the word *justification* in the sacred writings, generally signifies deliverance, and in that sense I understand it in this passage) our Saviour himself, I say, whose merits with the Father were the primary means of procuring us this grace, expressly convinceth us that it is to be obtained by prayer. For, in the first place, this was the method by which he proposed to obtain it for us—I will pray to the Father, says he, and he will send you another Comforter, who shall abide with you always; and, in the next place, he assures his disciples, that his heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it. The passage is express to the purpose. *I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Which of you, being a father, if his son shall ask bread, will give him a stone? Or if a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Nay, and if he should ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much rather shall your Father, who is in heaven, give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* The pains that the Divine Reasoner hath taken to convince his disciples upon this point of faith, are very remarkable. He first commands, or rather exhorts them to offer their prayers to God; then, for their encouragement, he assures them that such prayers are heard and granted; and afterwards, for their conviction, he infers an undeniable conclusion from a parity of reason. Thus there remains no doubt, that as the mediation of Christ is the primary, so prayer is the secondary means of Grace.

In what words, then, and with what spirit shall we pray? *Wherewithal shall we come before the Lord, and humble ourselves before the high God?* Is not, it may be asked, that form of prayer which our Saviour taught his disciples, comprehensive of *all* our wants, and *sufficient* for the Christian church in all ages? Should this question be put, I would answer in the negative. The prayer which our Saviour taught his disciples was a temporary form. The redemption of mankind was not then accomplished; the means of grace were not effectuated. The Saviour of the

world was not ascended into heaven, and it was in consequence of his ascension only, that *the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth*, was granted to the church. *If I go not away, says he, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go away, I will send him unto you.* It was impossible, therefore, that he should teach his disciples to pray for that grace which was not yet attainable, nor communicated, except in an especial manner. Some subtle interpreters have, indeed, supposed, that the meaning of 'thy kingdom come,' in the prayer above-mentioned, is metaphorical, and that the influence of grace is thereby signified; but, setting aside those arguments I have brought against the possibility of this interpretation, I would ask these men, whether it be probable that the wise Author of our salvation should teach his disciples to express so important a petition by a distant metaphor? Whether he who taught them plainly to say 'Give us this day our daily bread;' would not, if it had been then proper, have taught them as plainly to say, 'Give us the grace of thy Holy Spirit;' or to have expressed themselves in some other form of words as clear, and as much to the purpose. Had the words, *thy kingdom come*, no signification that was literally obvious, they might as well have been wrested to one sense as to another; but the kingdom of God was an expression familiar to the ears of the disciples, and to them it required no comment. They knew that it meant the establishment of the Messiah's evangelical kingdom. Another argument that this form of prayer was temporary, and is now insufficient, is this, that the apostles made use of other prayers. To prove this, it is not necessary to adduce a single instance, because numbers offer themselves.

Neither is it necessary for me to instruct you, Constantia, in what words you should pray for the assistance of the Divine Spirit. Eloquence is in no wise essential to prayer; it may be necessary for the persuasion of men, but God *setteth it at nought*. Let us not think that we shall be heard the sooner for our *much speaking*, nor yet for the elegance of our expression. If we pray by a set

form, let the language of it be artless and unaffected, and in that respect resemble the *singleness* or simplicity of heart, with which we should offer it to the all-knowing Wisdom. I would readily give you such a form as I speak of; but the church alloweth not a private ecclesiastick to compose and communicate a form of prayer. For you, however, whose understanding is clear, and whose memory is retentive, who digest your thoughts with propriety, and express them with ease, scarce any form of private devotion is necessary.\*

With regard to the spirit and manner wherewith we ought to approach the eternal Providence, we cannot be too attentive to so important a circumstance. We should endeavour, as much as possible, to be serene and recollected. Before we address that almighty Being, we should meditate a moment on his sublime perfections, and fill our minds with the idea of his glorious attributes. But rather let us contemplate him in his benevolent, than in his judicial capacity. We ought, indeed, never to be without the idea of the latter, but the first should always have the leading influence in our minds. Our heavenly Father treated us not as servants, but as sons; our acts of obedience, therefore, to him should be purely filial. He delighteth not in the prostration of servile fear, but in the cheerful worship of reverential gratitude. Let us not approach him with the cries and lamentations of Moloch's worshippers, nor with the self-castigation of the votaries of Baal. Yet, on this, as well as on every other occasion, let us remember the vast distance between fallen man and his Creator; let us consider that our God, though seated on the throne of everlasting mercy, is an offended Being, whose laws we have broken, and to whose favour we have forfeited our natural right. These reflections will make us approach him with that humble and dependent spirit, which must become a frail and erring creature, in the presence of it's almighty and all-perfect Judge.

Let the incense we offer him be the pure and undisssembled devotion of the heart. Let us avoid the Pharisaical ostentation of long prayers. Our moral

\* How idle have been all the disputes concerning the preference of praying by *form*, or praying *extempore*! Both have the preference in their proper place; the former in publick, the latter in private devotion.

and religious, as well as our natural wants, may be expressed in few words, and God is not slow to hear. One penitential sigh, one humble acknowledgment, will find its way to heaven. One earnest petition for the Divine Assistance, one sincere expression of gratitude, will be as effectual as a thousand repetitions. Diffuse and declamatory prayer is a mark of fanaticism, the bold and extravagant effusion of *bold impudence*. Shall we think that the Divine Wisdom is to be courted by *much speaking*? Is it necessary that the sincere of heart shall weary Heaven with long importunity? Would not this be to suppose that God is hard to be intreated, or that his ear is obstructed, *and cannot hear*? How brief is that temporary form of prayer which our Saviour taught his disciples! Does that form contain one mere superfluous word, or one mere collateral or unimportant thought! Is the imagination indulged in vain descriptions, or are the passions roused to eager imprecations? as if the Divine Author of it had foreseen the idle prolixity of those ranting prayers which should be used in future ages of the church, he has in the above-mentioned form been remarkably concise. There is not, perhaps, in any language, an instance of composition where so much is expressed in so few words.

It must be owned, however, that to express our thoughts with brevity and precision, must be the effect of literary skill with us, as it was of divine knowledge with the Author of the disciples prayer. But from the brevity of that prayer we may learn, what may be of more general use, to offer no superfluous addresses to the Almighty. If we look into many of our modern forms of prayer, particularly such as have been composed by Christians for their private use, and afterwards printed for the service of the publick, we shall find that this precept has been very much neglected. With a profusion of depreciating expressions, partly taken from the sacred writings, and partly the coinage of their own imaginations, as if they would make a merit of their self-abasement, they are loud in complaining of themselves as the worst of creatures. This is a burlesque upon Christian humility. I have known a pious lady, whose life was one continued scene of devotion, daily repeat these humiliating

lyes, when she offered up her prayers to the Father of truth and wisdom. Our Saviour's approbation of the publican's prayer affords no argument in favour of these. The publican was supposed to be really a sinner, not in the ordinary, but in the extraordinary sense of the word; yet even he makes *no parade of humiliation*. He, though a publican, does not call himself the worst of men, but saith simply, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' This was all that he said, and all that was necessary for him to say.

These over abasing forms of prayer are not only improper for the Christian who leads a regular life, but must likewise be repugnant to his conscience, and obnoxious to his sincerity. It is impossible that, while he is sensible of his good disposition, and endeavours to live according to the Divine laws, he should believe himself to be the wicked wretch that his prayers represent him.

I have yet one objection more to these humiliating rants, these effusions of fanaticism. They are not only improper for the good man, but unnecessary for the sinner—at least, on the part of God they are unnecessary: for, 'of God can it be supposed, that he is ignorant of our conduct, and must learn it from a multitude of self-abasing words? Or shall we think that he delights in the frequent mention of that wickedness, the practice of which offended him? Or may we believe that he will be prevailed upon by the loudness of tautological declamation? If these things are not to be supposed, we shall conclude that these harangues of self abasement are unnecessary with respect to God, and that it will be more proper, as well as more modest, for the sinner to use the brief acknowledgment of the publican.'

Long and loud confessions of sin before God, are always a mark of weak understanding: nay, I have known some ecclesiasticks so extremely injudicious as to recommend this practice in private devotion; and so weak as to advise us, in our addresses to God, to mention particularly the several sins we have been guilty of. Is not this to suppose *that God is even such a one as ourselves*? Or is it not to conceive yet *more* meanly of him? When a person is disposed to ask forgiveness of those whom he has offended, and to acknowledge his faults, would a generous mind be delighted with

with the recapitulation of them? Would it not rather be painful to a generous mind? And shall we dare to think that man is possessed of greater generosity, or more enlarged conceptions, than that infinite Being from whom he derives both? Why, then, ye self-abasing sinners, will ye weary God with your mistaken prayers? Why will ye offer to the Divine ear what it delighteth not to hear? Can ye not be humble, without importuning Heaven with your acts of humility? Is not this a species of *eye-service*?

Let us consider the parable of the prodigal son, which may in some measure be looked upon as a form of repentance. He had meditated, we are told, a short speech of acknowledgment. *'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and no longer am worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.'* This confession he meditated, and this was as brief, for the circumstances, as the prayer of the publican. But what do we find in the sequel of the story? We find that this short speech was rendered still shorter, by the omission of the last clause. The penitent son, after he had met with such a gracious reception from his father, probably concluded that such a humiliating overture would give him pain; or if he were about to make it, the father interrupted him, by calling to his servants, and ordering the best robes. Observe, my Constantia, the skill of the sacred parabolist in this place. *And the son said unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and no longer am worthy to be called thy son.'* — But the father said unto his servants, *'Bring forth the prime robe, and put it upon him.'* Is not the omission of the last clause in the premeditated speech, (*make me as one of thy hired servants*) after such a reception, remarkably beautiful? When this is considered, does it appear in the least probable that the father should either expect, or take delight in a detail of his son's follies and vices?

As an act of repentance, with respect to God, such a detail cannot be necessary: for what is repentance, but a relinquishment of sins, from a conviction that they have offended the Judge of the world?

I have said more on this circumstance

than I at first intended, and possibly more than you may think it required: but nothing is unimportant that relates to the worship of God, or that contributes any thing to rectify that worship.

For this reason, you will favour me with your attention, while I point out some other errors that I have observed in forms of devotion. Among these are impertinent expressions, such as have no immediate relation either to the general or particular purposes of prayer; such as are introduced merely for parade, or such as have no other end than to fill the harmony of a period, or to form the side of an antithesis. Of these I could produce many instances, from almost every form of prayer, whether public or private, from profuse expatiations on the past and present works of God, and from superfluous details of our conduct towards him; when with careful minuteness we inform him of circumstances which he knows better than ourselves.

Neither can I approve of those devout rhapsodies, those *sportings* of zeal, that holy dalliance with God, which swell the morning and evening devotions of many pious Christians. These desultory effusions are inconsistent with that reverence which is due to an Almighty Being.

In short: Let us, when we pray, be modest, humble, calm, and recollected; and let our forms of prayers be chaste, subdued, concise, and pertinent.

When we approach the Almighty, let us not borrow our ideas of him from human characteristics: let us remember, that *his ways are not our ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts; — that as much as heaven is higher than the earth, so much are his ways bigger than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.* This reflection will at all times teach us a becoming reverence for our glorious Creator; and particularly, in our addresses to him, it will suggest to us the impropriety of vain and impertinent declamation, of the ostentatious effusions of fanatic impudence, and the importunate familiarities of forward zeal.

Adieu! my Constantia. May you offer up your prayers in an acceptable time!

FRANCIS.

LETTER

## LETTER X.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

**Y**OUR letters displease me, my paternal friend, they make me displeased with myself. Every page is a mirror that reflects some circumstance of folly or ignorance in my past conduct. When I compare my opinions and my practice with those which you recommend, I am mortified with beholding some essential difference.—But go on, dear, cruel instructor, go on to humble the proud heart of your Constantia; make her see in yet many more instances, what a weak, ignorant, short-sighted creature she is.

But indeed you ought to conquer that vanity, which in former days you contributed to strengthen; when, too prodigal of compliment, you would overrate the talents of your Constantia; and, in the humility of tender affection, would profess yourself her pupil! Be patient, and indulge me. You make me sensible of my weakness: I am yet a woman, and must complain; I will have my revenge, and convince *you* of your errors. Do I not owe much of my pride and vanity to you? Did you not, in the days of flattering love, cherish and support those unserviceable foibles? Having no other ambition than to please Theodosius, if he appeared satisfied with my accomplishments, I thought them sufficient: if he praised my talents, I believed them to be great; and was indifferent about new acquisitions of knowledge. Thus, my friend, I bring a heavy charge against you, and impute to you, in some measure, my pride and ignorance. Thus it is, that while your letters convince me of the latter, I gratify the first by a flattering excuse. Poor Constantia! how much of human weakness dost thou yet retain!

You have much to do, my venerable guide, much to do, before you shall have rendered your pupil as wise and as good as she ought to be.

What means this uneasiness that hangs upon my heart? Surely your letter, your valuable letter, could not cause it. And yet I think, I had less pleasure from it than from any other that you have written to me. Was it because you have not so often appealed to me by the endearing name of *your*

Constantia? To you, my confessor, my guide, and friend, I can open all my weakness. What means this uneasiness that hangs upon my heart?

CONSTANCE.

## LETTER XI.

THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

**A**MIABLE tenderness! Dear Constantia! set your heart at ease. Exert your reason; tax your fortitude; call forth the nobler faculties of your mind, and charge them to assert their empire over the wayward passions.

While we are in this state of being, we must encounter difficulties, and struggle with uneasiness. The heart will often be dissatisfied we know not why, and reason will stand an idle spectator, as if unconscious of its power. In such cases it ought to be awakened from its lethargy, and reminded of the task to which it is appointed. It should be informed of the high office it bears in the oeconomy of the soul, and be made acquainted with the insidious vigilance of its enemies.

But while we languish under the uneasiness of discontent, we cannot take a more effectual method to recover our peace, than to consider the insignificance of every passion that centers, and pursuit that terminates here. Suppose our earthly aims were directed to their object by the favouring gale of fortune; suppose our pursuits should be crowned with all the success that flattering hope assigns them; yet, vain, changeable, and impotent as we are, the success would not be worth a moment's triumph. While the heart turns upon an earthly axis, like the perishable ball that it loves, it will be variously affected by outward influences. Sometimes it will bear the fruits of gladness, and sometimes be the barren desert of melancholy; one while it will be exhilarated by the sunshine of pleasure, and again it will languish in the gloom of discontent. The cause of this is, not only that the human heart is in itself changeable and uncertain, deriving its sensations from constitutional influences, but that the objects, if they are earthly objects, on which it depends for happiness, are liable to variation and decay.

Hence

Hence arises the superiority of religious views. When our hopes of happiness are fixed on one certain event; one event which, though remote, cannot be altered by mortal contingencies, the heart has an invariable foundation whereon it may rest. Without this resting-place, we should be *tossed to and fro with every wind* of fortune, the sport of chance, and the dupes of expectation. To this immoveable anchor of the soul religion directs us in the hopes of immortality. We know from the unerring word of Divine Revelation, that we shall exist in another state of being, after the dissolution of this; and we are confirmed by every benevolent purpose of Providence, in the belief that our future existence shall be infinitely happy. In this glorious hope the interests of a temporary life are swallowed up and lost. This hope, like the serpent of Aaron, devours the mock-phantoms which are created by the magick of this world, and at once shews the vanity of every earthly pursuit.

Compared with this prospect, my Constantia, how poor, how barren would every scene of mortal happiness appear! How despicable at the best—yet how liable to be destroyed by every storm of adversity! For, are we not exposed to a thousand accidents, the most trifling of which may be sufficient to break a scheme of felicity? Let us consider those conditions that are almost universally desired, the dignity of the great, and the affluence of the rich. Are these above the reach of misfortune? Are they exempt from the importunities of care? Greatness is but the object of impertinence and envy, and riches create more wants than they are able to gratify. Should then our wishes lead to these, we should unavoidably be disappointed. The acquisition might for a while soothe our vanity, but we should soon sigh for the ease of obscurity, and envy the content of those whom pride would call our vassals.

If wealth or grandeur, then, cannot afford us happiness, where shall we seek it? Is it to be found in the cell of the hermit? or does it watch by the taper of solitary learning? Loves it the society of laughing mirth? or does it affect the pensive pleasures of meditation? Is it only genuine in the cordiality of friendship, or in the lasting ten-

derness of married love? Alas! my Constantia, this train of alternatives will not do. Should we fly from the trouble of society to some lonely hermitage, we should soon sigh for the amusements of the world we had quarrelled with. The strongest mind could not long support the burden of uncommunicated thought, and the firmest heart would languish in the stagnation of melancholy.

Ask the solitary scholar, if ever, in his learned researches, he beheld the retreat of happiness—Amusement is all that he will pretend to—Amusement! in quest of which the active powers of the mind are frequently worn out, the understanding enervated by the assiduity of attention, and the memory overburdened with unessential ideas.

Yet, possibly, happiness may mingle with society, and swell the acclamations of festive mirth. No; the joy that dwells there cannot be called happiness; for the noise of mirth will vanish with the echo of the evening, and *even in laughter the heart is sad*. If we are able to distinguish the elegance of conversation, we shall often be disgusted with the arrogance of pride, or the impertinence of folly; and if not, we may be amused indeed with the noise, but can never taste the pleasures of society.

As little reason have we to hope for lasting happiness from the engagements of friendship or of love. The condition of human life is at best so uncertain, that it is even dangerous to form any connections that are dear. The tenderness of love, my Constantia, opens the heart to many sufferings, to many painful apprehensions for the health and safety of its object, and many uneasy sensations both from real and imaginary causes. It was from this conviction I told you, in the letter wherein I first discovered myself to you, 'that the love we have had for one another will make us more happy in its disappointment; than it could have done in its success.'

For want of a better remedy to these evils, the wisdom of ancient philosophy teaches us to bid a brave defiance to the assaults of pleasure and of pain. This precept it urges with unremitting austerity; without making any allowance for particular tempers or circumstances; without instructing us how to behave

behave to the solicitations of joy or pleasure; how to defend the heart from the inroads of sorrow, or guard against the unseen stratagems of distress.

But the religion of a Christian affords a nobler and a safer refuge. With the exalted hopes that this presents to us, *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared.* In those glorious hopes let us bury every anxious thought, the uneasiness of discontent, and the solicitude of care. Let us not sink under our light afflictions, which are but for a moment. A very few years, perhaps a few months or days, may bring us into that state of being, where care and misery perplex no more. *Though we have now our bed in darkness, and our pillow on the thorn, yet the time draweth nigh when we shall taste of life without anguish, and enjoy the light without bitterness of soul. The night is far spent, my Constantia, the day is at hand; let us therefore gird up the lains of our mind, and be sober*—no longer dissipated, or disturbed with the troubles of this world. We are hourly hastening to that scene of existence, *where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest*; where hope shall no more be cut off by disappointment, and where the distresses of time are forgot in the joys of eternity.

FRANCIS.

## LETTER XII.

### CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

**I**S it thus that you hope to reform your Constantia? Do you think that you shall be able to effect this by letting her foibles pass uncensured, and conveying instruction to her in general terms? Alas! how little do you know of her petulant and capricious heart! It must be corrected with severity, and quieted by overbearing reproof.

At present, indeed, it is sufficiently depressed. Your observations on the folly and vanity of expecting happiness in this world, came to me at a time when painful experience convinced me of their truth.

After Theodosius was lost to me, I contracted a friendship with an amiable and accomplished woman, to whom my melancholy and my misfortunes

served only to endear me the more. Her good sense and her compassion soothed and supported me under all my sufferings. She left me not to the attacks of solitary discontent, but assiduously diverted my mind by the efforts of elegant humour, polished sense, and ingenious observation. As if she had preferred the company of sorrow to every social amusement, even in that season of life when the heart of health and peace is always gay, she never forsook me during the last five unhappy years. She observed, with unwearied vigilance, the hour when melancholy apprehension was increased to the acuteness of grief. She then followed me into whatever privacy I sought; clasped me to her faithful bosom; and if, under the agonies of terror and anguish, tears refused their assistance, she solicited, and obtained them by her infectious tenderness. When, at last, I determined to take the veil, and had obtained my father's consent to forsake the world for ever, her affection followed me in that final resolution. She waited only for an approaching opportunity to settle her worldly affairs, after which she intended to have made one of our sisterhood, and to have passed the remaining part of her life with her Constantia.

Upon this event my heart reposed. I foresaw in this a scene of happiness that could not be equalled upon earth, and I flattered myself that it would be as lasting as my own life. How many pleasing hours have I passed in meditating on the future felicity of our friendship! How often, in the luxury of imagination, have I considered our united prayers ascending more acceptably to the Throne of everlasting Mercy! What joy did I promise myself, what importance in the eye of friendship, by communicating to my Sophia all the instructions I had received from my Theodosius.

Oh, my friend! my father! these hopes are overthrown. Do I live to tell you by what means? Sophia, my tender, my dear Sophia, is no more! The uneasiness I expressed in my last proceeded probably in some measure from my presentiments of this cruel event. I am now very miserable, and in great need of your paternal advice.

CONSTANCE.

## LETTER XIII.

## THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

A S true friendship is one of the greatest blessings of human life, our sorrow for the loss of friends is more excusable than most of our complaints. But, though it may be more venial, it is not more reasonable than any other mode of misery that has its origin in disappointment. Did we think our friends immortal? Did we not know, while we held them to our hearts, that we were embracing the property of death, who would sooner or later assert his claim?

Our resignation to this, as well as to all other evils, ought to be confirmed by reflecting on the universal agency of Providence. The author of the book of Psalms furnishes us with excellent doctrine on this subject. We have scarce any where such striking pictures of human misery as in that book. The royal writer has described, in the strongest colours, the distresses and perplexities to which, as men, we are subject. He has descended to the private dissatisfactions of the heart, and recounted many circumstances of accidental calamity. Hence it is that his writings are of general use. Of the distresses that are incident to our being, though the prospect be gloomy, it is necessary we should observe it; as he who must make his way through pitfalls and precipices, would chuse a plan of the road he was to travel, rather than march blindly forward without knowledge and without caution.

But these are not all the instructions which the Psalmist affords us. We are seldom presented with an afflicted prospect of life, without being directed to the means of comfort. We are told that, however great the causes of our affliction may be, they are subject to the wise directions of a Being benevolent to man; and that, though *heaviness may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning*. The doctrine of an universal providence, which is the only source of consolation under every species of misery, is asserted through this whole book with the greatest confidence of certainty.

Who is like unto the Lord our God, who hath his dwelling so high,

and yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth?

Thou shalt shew us wonderful things in thy righteousness, O God of our salvation! Thou that art the hope of all the ends of the earth, and of them that remain in the broad sea. They also that dwell in the uttermost parts of the world shall attend to thy tokens. Thou that makest the out-goings of the morning, and the evening to praise thee.

In this belief of the universal agency of Providence the Psalmist places the remedy of moral and natural evil.

Should I find trouble and heaviness, I will call upon the name of the Lord. O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul!

The Lord preserveth the innocent: I was in misery, and he helped me.

The proud, O Lord, have had me exceedingly in derision, but I remembered thy everlasting judgments, and received comfort.

The last sentiment ought to be engraven upon the hearts of all the children of affliction.

Let us remember that God is the Supreme Governor of the universe; that under his direction is the whole system of nature, by him animated, connected, supported. Let us consider that the agency of man in this system is only moral. The œconomy of life is committed to him so far as it may exercise his moral will: but the events of his actions are finally under the determination of the Almighty. Were not he to direct the natural course of this world, even in those circumstances of it that are or may be affected by the moral power of man, order could no more be preserved in the universe, than it could at first result from chance, or be formed by the direction of fallible beings.

This consideration, that the Supreme Power has in his own hands the œconomy of the world, ought to engage our resignation under every circumstance of life: for, should we quarrel with the dispensations of him who gave us being? Should we dispute the regulations of that power, who has provided the means of this day's subsistence, and without whose favour and protection we could no longer exist? Is not he who made the world best able to govern it?

it? Has not he who gave us this being a right to resume it?

What mean, then, the pangs of disappointment? What mean the languishing complaints of sorrow? The tears that flow for buried virtue, and the sighs that mourn for parted friendship?

But to these questions you will say others may be opposed. You will ask if these emotions ought to be excluded from the human heart, when they are evidently the effect of nature? You will enquire whether the God of nature would plant affections in his creatures, which to stifle would be a virtue?

To these questions I would reply, that those affections for the objects of this world, which we have received with our being, may be indulged, but under certain limitations. Let us always consider the end of such affections. Certainly it could not be to create us misery, when those objects are no more; for that would be indirectly to repine at the dispensations of him who has removed them from us.

The voice of nature will be heard, and our tears will flow when our dearest connections are broken. In this we only act like men: but when sorrow is long indulged, it becomes criminal; for then we tamely give ourselves up to those passions which it is our duty to restrain, and act in petulant opposition to the decrees of Providence.

Human life must have many avenues to sorrow and anxiety, while we are concerned for the welfare of those objects which have engaged our affections, or the success of those schemes on which all our wisdom has been employed. The duty of resignation, therefore, like every other that is enjoined us, is calculated to promote our own happiness. When we remember the *everlasting judgments* of God, we may reasonably be filled with comfort in every event.

'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth unto him good. It is the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, and in truth.'

'Why should ye say unto my soul, that she should flee as a bird unto the hill? Behold the Lord, the Lord of Hosts is my refuge; the God of Jacob is on my right-hand.'

Under such confidence as this, what have we to fear, and for what should we sigh? That misfortunes seem to

counteract our schemes of happiness, and that the prospects of hope are cut off by disappointment; we might mourn indeed, were this the only scene of our existence, and were our views terminated by our departure from it. That human knowledge is often inadequate to the purposes of life, and always imperfect, would be a melancholy consideration, were it not attended with the prospect of an existence, where knowledge as well as happiness, shall flow from the fountain of Infinite Perfection.

This reflection might, one should think, be sufficient to set our hearts at ease with respect to temporary misfortunes; but still more powerful will be the motives to resignation, when we consider that the Father of heaven has not only promised us a safe retreat at last from our afflictions, but to support us under them.

'These things have I said unto you, that in me ye might have peace: in the world ye shall have tribulation.'

'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them falleth not to the ground without the permission of my Father who is in heaven. Are not ye of more value than many sparrows?'

That man in the system of nature has a peculiar regard shewn him, it would be superfluous to observe. None of us can be so blind to the bounties we enjoy, nor to the eminent prerogatives by which we are distinguished. But I may infer, that as the favour of the Almighty is so evidently seen in man, his confidence in him, under every circumstance of life, ought to be in proportion. If he is distinguished by the light of reason, he ought not surely to make that light an instrument to censure the perfection from which it flows—yet discontent is a kind of censure on Providence.

Alas! my dear Constantia, how mistaken is the man, how much an enemy to his own happiness, who confides not in the measures, nor resigns to the dispensations of his Creator: he robs himself at once of that sovereign remedy of evil, reliance on a superior power. He is involved in calamities without the alleviation of hope, and subject to misfortunes without redress.

But happy, above all names of happiness, is he who with grateful humility submits to the determinations of God. The vicissitudes of fortune cannot dis-

trials him. He is secure in the care of Almighty Goodness. Nature may shrink back from the stroke of affliction, but the conflict that is supported by hope can neither be long nor painful.

Why art thou so full of heaviness,  
O my soul, and why art thou so dis-  
quieted within me? Trust in God.

The great object of his hope, the perfect happiness of a future existence, he knows, cannot be very distant—that he has but to travel a few days longer till he reach the mansions of everlasting rest, where the miseries and delusions of mortality shall vanish, and *sorrow and mourning shall flee away*. Adieu, my Constantia! Think of these things, and be happy.

FRANCIS.

#### LETTER XIV.

##### THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

**W**ITHOUT waiting any return to my last, I once more sit down to write to you. I would in some measure imitate that dear and valuable friend you have lost, whose assiduous tenderness, you say, would never leave you to the attacks of solitary sorrow. This was wisely done when your grief had continued unreasonably long; but I am always of opinion, that under the first stages of sorrow the mind should be left to itself; and would our common rules permit me to visit you, I should decline it till the violence of your grief subsided.

The objection, however, does not lie with the same force against writing to you. We can better bear the sentiments of our friends, when they are not personally witnesses to our weakness.

My design at present is not to instruct but to amuse you. I therefore send you poetry instead of philosophy; or rather, indeed, philosophy harmonized; for the sentimental part of the following composition is truly noble.

##### PSALM CVII.

**Y**ET once more wake the strain of grateful praise,  
To that Eternal Power whose mercy shines  
O'er all his works, immortal! Let them wake  
The grateful strain once more, those happier  
sons,

Whom his hand rescued from the hostile  
chain

Of old captivity! From climes remote,  
From the first openings of the orient day,  
From Hesper's silver flood-gates, from the star  
That shoots its pale rays o'er the shivering  
north,

From Egypt's tyrant shores, his parent voice  
Their scattered trains assembled. Long they  
stray'd

Thro' wild woods unfrequented; long—not  
found

City, or safe abode; till nature sunk  
With meagre want oppress'd, and the faint pulse  
Of life beat weakly. Then, with humble  
prayer

To Heaven they turn'd repentant; nor un-  
heard.

Eternal Mercy led the wanderers forth  
To habitable towns, and safe abodes.

O for the spirit of exalted praise,  
To blazon high those acts of power divine,  
Those boundless mercies that embrace  
mankind!

They, thrice unhappy! o'er whose joyless  
heads

Grim darkness hovers, they who lonely dwell  
In Death's uncheerful shade, afflicted, bound  
In cold imprisoning chains, the sad reward  
Of impious, daring, and rebellious deeds,  
When heavenly Justice, with her radiant arm  
Smites their proud hearts; e'en they, by  
humble prayer,

Unfold sweet Mercy's easy-sliding gates;  
Their iron bondage bursts, and forth they rush  
From Death's dim shadow to the golden day.

O for the spirit of exalted praise,  
To blazon high those acts of power divine,  
Those boundless mercies that embrace  
mankind!

Folly's vain votaries, from disorder wild,  
And mad intemperance, reaping painful  
fruits,

Disease and languor, to the dreary door  
Of Death move trembling.—Then with  
humble prayer

To Heaven they turn repentant, nor unheard.  
Health's rosy light relumes the languid cheek,  
And Ruin quits his meditated prey.

O for the spirit of exalted praise,  
To blazon high those acts of power divine,  
Those boundless mercies that embrace  
mankind!

Let man for ever wake the grateful strain,  
The sacrifice of reason; ever sing  
His Maker's works, and triumph in the song.

The bold adventurers, on the stormy breast  
Of ocean, tenants of the wat'ry world,  
Mark

Mark in the mighty waste of seas and skies,  
Magnificence Divine. At his command  
The swift wind sweeps the billows; up they  
rise

Infuriate to the vault of heaven, then down  
Precipitately steep, disparting, ope  
The vast abyis voracious. Ah! where then,  
Weak mariners, your hopes? Then the heart  
faints.

From side to side they run, they reel, they fall,  
Inebriate with confusion. Nought remains  
But trembling prayer, the last appeal to Hea-  
ven.

Nor vain the last appeal. Already, see!  
The rapid storm subsides, and the wave sleeps.  
Alert within the merry sailor's heart  
Springs hope; and soon he hails the welcome  
port.

O for the spirit of exalted praise,  
To blazon high those acts of power divine,  
Those boundless mercies that embrace  
mankind!

From the full choir of undistinguish'd  
crowds,  
From Wisdom's chosen synod, crown'd with  
years,  
To him for ever flow collective praise!

Where in wild sweetness rose the fallying  
spring,  
Where spread the copious river, where dis-  
play'd  
The vale it's verdant honours, barren lies  
A dry waste, mark of Heaven's avenging  
hand;  
When sacred Justice spoke the doom of guilt.

But lo! where once the dry waste barren lay,  
There in wild sweetness flows the fallying  
spring,

There spreads the copious river, there displays  
The vale it's verdant honours; hamlets fair,  
Rich harvests, blushing vineyards, golden  
fruits,  
And flocks abundant, the long-famish'd swain  
Beholds delighted. Heaven's peculiar care  
Are all Affliction's children: when the yoke  
Of stern Oppression sinks the weary heart,  
Perish the stern oppressors: low in dust,  
Low lies each princely head; while guard-  
ed safe,

As flocks reposing in their evening fold,  
The peasant sleeps in peace. O sight of joy  
To faithful Piety! of conscious pain,  
And keen conviction, to the heart of guilt!

This, this is Wisdom's lesson: to explore  
The active scheme of Providence; to learn  
His love divine; and, learning, to confide.

There is no employment so delight-  
ful to a devout mind as this attention to  
the visible administration of Providence.

To contemplate the Creator of the  
universe in the magnificence of his  
works, enlarges and elevates the soul,  
lifts it above the impertinence of vulgar  
cares, and gives it a kind of heavenly  
pre-existence. To consider the bene-  
volent purposes for which he called  
forth this variety and multitude of be-  
ing, that comes under our cognizance,  
must be a perpetual source of comfort.  
A rational creature, that is conscious of  
deriving it's existence from a Being of  
infinite goodness and power, cannot pro-  
perly entertain any prospect but of hap-  
piness. By the imperfection of it's na-  
ture it may fall into temporary evils,  
but these cannot justly be the subject of  
complaint, when we reflect that this  
very imperfection was necessary to a pro-  
batory life, and that, without it, there  
could neither have been virtue, nor the  
rewards of virtue. Every degree of  
excellence depends upon comparison.  
Were there no deformity in the world,  
we should have no distinct ideas of beau-  
ty: were there no possibility of vice,  
there would be no such thing as virtue;  
and were the life of man exempt from  
misery, happiness would be a term of  
which he could not know the meaning.  
Adieu! Be wise and happy.

FRANCIS.

## LETTER XV.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

IF I could pronounce my heart to be  
perfectly at ease, you would have the  
only reward you desire for your pater-  
nal care. But shall I, on the contrary,  
avow my ingratitude? Shall I own that  
this obstinate, this petulant heart, is  
not yet at rest? Could it oppose itself  
to the united efforts of reason and reli-  
gion? Would it neither be soothed by  
harmony, nor silenced by philosophy?  
Vain, incorrigible heart!

Indeed, my venerable friend, I must  
not dissemble with you: I have not yet  
recovered my former peace. And yet,  
why? I have the same confidence in  
the administration of Providence. I be-  
lieve as much in his goodness, as much  
in his wisdom. I attend, with the same  
readiness, on the duties of religion, and  
offer up my prayers with the same assi-  
duity, I agree to every conclusion you  
have

have drawn either from moral or religious arguments. I acknowledge the propriety, the duty of resignation, under every circumstance of affliction, and yet I am afflicted. I see the absurdity of grief, yet I am grieved. What can I do more? I submit entirely to the dispensations of Providence. My will submits. I do not wish to call my departed friend to life: but this submission does not clear my heart of sorrow. Surely it has some connections which are not obedient to the will, and from which it derives involuntary pleasure or pain. Is not this true? We experience it in all instances of affection: we are sensible of attachments we cannot account for; and as those attachments are facilitated or interrupted, we are happy or miserable independently of reason or the will. If these observations are founded upon truth and nature, I hope I shall stand excused both before you, and at a higher tribunal, for those tears that have fallen over the grave of my Sophia.

Think not that I implicitly give myself up to the dominion of my Sorrow. I have been too well acquainted with it, not to know by what means it's influence is increased or abated. I do not deepen the gloom of melancholy by solitary reflection; I seek the society of the sisterhood, and endeavour to enter into their amusements, as well as to join their devotions. In those hours when I must necessarily be alone, if the uneasiness of my heart hinders the approach of sleep, I have recourse to my books; till at last the weariness of attention prevails over the force of sorrow, and procures me that rest which the latter would have prevented.

In the course of this reading, I have met with many things on which I wanted to consult you, but most of them have escaped me. Some of these, however, I remember. In a book of divinity, which, I suppose, must have been written by one of the heresy of Calvin, the author asserts that the 'Almighty' has appointed a day of grace to every man, beyond which there can be no remission of sin\*. I must own I was startled by this assertion, as it seemed to me to be very consequential. The following, I think, were some of the texts on which he founded this belief.

'Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near.'

'Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.'

'Again, he limiteth a day, saying, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.'

In another part of his book, he maintains that it is impossible for those who fall into sin, after having once been converted, to repent, or to be saved†. This doctrine he supports by the following passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

'It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame.'

To this passage he adds another, selected from the same book.

'If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of Grace?'

I must own these texts appeared to me to make very strongly for his argument; and yet if these doctrines were generally received, I think they would open more avenues to despair; for many Christians, I fear, must have sinned wilfully after repentance and conversion. But, possibly, I do not behold these Scriptures in a right point of view. Let me hope for your kind instructions; and pray for you

CONSTANTIA.

\* Many of our modern fanatics, methodists, &c. hold this doctrine.

† This is another doctrine of fanaticism.

## LETTER XVI.

## THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

YOU do well to amuse yourself by books and company; that amusement will divert your melancholy more effectually than any precepts of philosophy.

But what shall I say to your controversial studies? Shall I praise you for wearying your eyes over the pages of Calvinistick dreamers;—for honouring with your attention the groundless doctrines of narrow-sighted fanatics; who, either from want of knowledge or of candour, or more probably from want of both, have seized a limb of a text, and without attending either to the writer's design, or to the analogy of his reasoning, have founded upon the mere letter, doctrines that dishonour their God?

Such, and so founded, are those you have mentioned.

That God hath appointed a certain period in the life of man, beyond which he will not extend his grace to him, is a doctrine which is so far from having any foundation either in reason or revelation, that it is repugnant to the first, and totally unsupported by the latter.

The texts which your author has produced in support of his opinion, have no manner of connection with it.

'Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near.'

The whole chapter from which this passage is taken, refers to the time of the Messiah's first appearance. The prophet breaks out into raptures upon the view of that glorious æra; and apostrophizes to the people that should then be born, exhorting them not to lose the happy opportunity of making an interest with the Redeemer while he was personally present with them.

'O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'

This is Christ's apostrophe to Jerusalem, when he foretold it's approaching destruction. But what has this to do with the universal dispensation of Grace? The words are particularly applicable to the occasion on which they were spoken, and to the object where-

unto they were addressed. 'Unhappy city! I wish thou knewest, in this thy day, while thou art yet undestroyed, or while I am present with thee, the things that belong unto thy peace, thy everlasting peace, the mercies of redemption: but now they are hid from thine eyes; at this time thou perceivest them not.'

Or, possibly, *thy peace* may signify, thy temporal peace, and preservation from thine enemies; which interpretation the following verse seems to favour. 'But now they are hid from thine eyes. BECAUSE the days will come upon thee, when thine enemies,' &c. I incline to this sense; but whether this or the other be the true one, is quite immaterial to the œconomy of grace.

Let us now consider the last scripture which your author has adduced in favour of his doctrine.

'Again, he limiteth a day, saying, To-day, if ye will hear his voice.'

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the chapter from whence this passage is taken, endeavours to prove the certainty of that final rest which still remained to the people of God. Thus he forms his argument; 'That there is a rest for the people of God into which they have not yet entered, appears from that prophetick psalm of David, which alludes to the time of Christ's appearance upon earth. The prophet, referring to that time, saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice. You see he is determined as to the point of time; he limiteth or setteth apart a day: wherefore, from this passage it is apparent, that for you, Hebrews, for you the descendants of those who provoked God in the wilderness, and were not permitted to enter into his rest, a final rest still remains, to which you are invited.'

Thus it is, my Constantia, that the disciples of ignorance, folly and fanaticism, by disjoining and misconstruing the Scriptures, contrive their absurd doctrines; for instance, the tenet above-mentioned. Is it consistent with the justice or the goodness of God, who has appointed to man a life of probation, to limit the advantages, which, in his mercy, he has vouchsafed to him, to a shorter term than his life? While he leaves him still to contend with the enemies of his salvation, will he deprive him of his principal support, the

aid

aid of his grace? his grace, which he has promised to those that ask it, without exception, and without limitation?

I have done with the first tenet of your author; let us now see whether the second be better founded.

It is impossible, he maintains, for those who fall into sin, after having once been converted, to repent or to be saved. This opinion he supports by two passages from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Without making any remarks on the infallibility of that Epistle as a rule of faith, without taking notice of the difficulty and the late day of it's admission among the canonical books, I shall shew you that your author has made the passages he has selected from that book prove too much. What the writer of the Epistle means by *falling away*, in the first passage, and by *sinning wilfully* in the last, is the denial of the faith they had professed, and openly apostatizing from it. This is clear from the conclusion of both the passages. Those who *fall away* are said to *crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and to put him to open shame*. And he who *sinneth wilfully* is represented to *have trodden under foot the Son of God, to have counted the blood of the Covenant, where-with he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and to have done despite to the Spirit of Grace*.

From hence it appears, that for a downright apostate there is no hope of repentance or remission of sins. But your author has not confined this terrible denunciation to open apostasy. According to him, none who have fallen into sin after conversion are capable of being renewed by repentance, or saved by the redemption of Christ. This doctrine is equally unscriptural, and unreasonable.

Should man, circumstanced as he is, be exposed by frailty to final punishment, or reduced by accidentally falling into vice, to irretrievable ruin, he might either turn from the race that is set before him, in hopeless despondence, or vainly contend with danger and disgrace. The pilgrimage of human life is infinitely troublesome and perplexed. Dangers there are, and difficulties, which all must encounter, which can neither be eluded by vigilance, nor annihilated by contempt.

'A just man,' says the author of the

Book of Proverbs, 'falleth seven times, and riseth again.' In this place a certain, is put for an uncertain number; seven times being among the Jews an indefinite expression, used to signify any moderate number.

Our Saviour himself being asked how oft a brother should offend and be entitled to forgiveness, and whether or not till seven times, answered, 'Not until seven times, but till seventy times seven.' From this passage we have the utmost reason to hope, that whenever man shall effectually repent, the Divine Goodness will be ready to forgive him. For if we are commanded to receive into favour an offending brother, however frequently he may have trespassed against us, shall not our heavenly Father in like manner be ready to receive such a turn unto him? Shall God recommend such a conduct to man as he should not admit in himself? Are we not told, that the repentance of a sinner is unexceptionably so acceptable to the Almighty, that the angels in heaven rejoice, and congratulate their supreme and affectionate Creator on an event so agreeable to his gracious mind?

The prodigal in the Gospel returns not to his father till he had finished his course of riot, which was interrupted by nothing but his power to pursue it. He returns not till compelled by necessity, and therefore his repentance was not a voluntary virtue. But, behold, his father meets him while yet a great way off, and precludes his apologies by the most endearing reception. We have not, indeed, any account of a relapse in the accepted prodigal; but we are told that before the execution of his repentance, he said unto himself, 'How many hired servants of my father have bread enough, and to spare, while I perish with hunger!' Some such reflections he must frequently have made, when reduced to distress, and again probably must have quitted them from various motives.

We want not, however, this instance, to prove that a sinner may be restored to favour after falling away from his former resolutions and professions of obedience. The example of Peter is a sufficient proof in this case. To this I shall add another, which, though not of scriptural authority, is respectable, and very much to the present purpose.

Eusebius tells us, that Saint John, during

during his ministration to the western churches, cast his eye upon a young man remarkable for the extent of his knowledge, and the ingenuosness of his mind. The aged apostle thought that he had discovered in him an useful instrument for the propagation of Christianity. Accordingly, he took particular pains to convert him, and to instruct him in the divine doctrines of his Great Master. That he might be still better acquainted with the system of Christianity, at his departure, he recommended him to the care of a pious old father, who had some authority in the infant church. The youth continued a while in the duties of his new profession, and attended with care to the lectures of his venerable tutor. But his former associates, when they found themselves deserted by him, were grieved at the success of the apostle, and exerted their utmost efforts to regain so useful and so entertaining a companion. They succeeded in their attempts, and the father was forsaken. The apostle, after some time, returned to those parts. 'Where,' said he, with impatience, to his aged friend, 'where, my fellow-labourer, is 'my favourite youth?'—'Alas,' replied the good old man, with tears in his eyes, 'he is fallen; irrecoverably fallen: he has forsaken the society of the saints, and is now the leader of a gang of robbers in the neighbouring mountains.' Upon hearing this unexpected and unpleasing account, the apostle forgot his sufferings and his years, and hastened to the place of rendezvous; where, being seized by some of the band, he desired to speak with their captain. The captain being told that a strange pilgrim asked to be admitted to him, ordered him to be brought before him. But when he beheld the venerable apostle, his hopes of amusement were changed into shame and confusion; and the hardy leader of a band of robbers trembled before a poor unarmed old man. He quitted once more the society of wickedness, and lived and died in the service of his Redeemer.

From hence it is evident, that a relapse after repentance or conversion, was not looked upon by the primitive Christians, nor yet by the apostles themselves, as any means of excluding the future mercies of God.

An utter apostacy, an entire desertion

of the faith we have professed, and a contemptuous rejection of the grace we have received, may, according to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, render us incapable of repentance, and utterly disqualify us for the future mercies of God. But sins inferior to these will not reduce us to the same dreadful circumstances. Our Creator *knoweth whereof we are made, he remembereth that we are but clay; and though we may fall, yet we shall not be cast away, since he upholdeth us with his hand.*

God preserve you, my amiable friend! preserve and direct you through the uncertain paths of this world, till you arrive at the realms of everlasting rest; till your innocent, your happy spirit, shall quit, without a sigh, the tender frame that confines it, and rise, conducted by some smiling angel, to the blessed society of good men made perfect! Adieu!

FRANCIS

LETTER XVII.

CONSTANTIA TO THEODOSIUS.

THE everlasting doors of futurity are thrown open—the race of life is almost run, and this, probably, is the last time that your Constantia will have the happiness of pouring out her heart to you. I am seized with the first symptoms of that pestilential fever, which has been so universally fatal, that it brings with it almost the certainty of death. Now, therefore, before my faculties are overcome by the disease, I devote to you one hour more of a life in which you have had so great an interest.

In a situation like this it is natural to look back, and to take a view of the country through which we have travelled, before we lose sight of it for ever. The ways through which I have walked, though in many circumstances peculiar, and unlike the allotment of others, have yet, like others, been various, and different in the different periods of the journey. Before my present illness I drew up a short view of my life, part of which I will now transcribe, that with you it may serve as an apology for my conduct when I shall be no more.

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AN APOLOGY FOR THE LIFE OF  
SISTER CONSTANCE; WRITTEN  
BY HERSELF, AND ADDRESSED  
TO FATHER FRANCIS.

**Y**OU know how early I lost the best and most affectionate of mothers. That was a misfortune which, though then only bewailed with tears which had no meaning, left behind it a cloud that overshadowed the rest of my life. Had my infant years been trained by her, I should have acquired the habits of virtue from the influence of example. The want of this was much to be lamented, for there is a happy contagion in the power of living excellence, which, while we admire, we necessarily imitate. Those virtues which we draw from precept or speculation are seldom more than speculative; but those which we derive insensibly from the imitation of exemplary characters become lasting and habitual. But, besides the loss of a happy and an excellent pattern of every female virtue, I was deprived at the same time of those maternal cares, those tender assiduities, that watch over the young mind, accelerate the progress of reason, and supply the want of experience by precept. Of these advantages I was wholly destitute: for my father, inattentive to every thing but the acquisition of wealth, thought but little of the improvement of his daughter; or, if he thought of it at all, concluded that she would necessarily improve in proportion to the advancement of her fortune. Accordingly, I was abandoned to the common forms of female education, without those private attentions, those exemplary influences, which are of infinitely greater importance than all general instructions.

Thus unapprehensive and uninformed, in the first thoughtless advances from childhood to maturity, is it to be wondered that the amiable and accomplished Theodosius should find an easy admittance to a heart where every passion was awake, all unguarded, and none restrained?

But the severity of wisdom itself (prudence, you have told me, is but the ape of wisdom) could have had few objections against the passion that I entertained. For did it not receive a sanction from the object? What did I admire in Theodosius? Was it a symmetry of features? Was it not the piercing ge-

nious, and the cultivated mind? While his knowledge enlightened, his sensibility charmed me; and while at once he taught my heart and my mind to expand, is it to be wondered that he made room for himself? The powers of genius have an irresistible charm for taste; and while Theodosius was forming the mind of Constantia, he was cherishing a plant which, like the gourd of Jonah, as soon as it sprung up, would stretch its arms to embrace him.

When this intercourse of growing tenderness was at an end, when the obstinacy of ridiculous pride divided the families of Theodosius and Constantia, what did I not feel from the apprehension of being separated from the man I loved? Pride, however, came in to my aid; I shed a few angry tears, and commanded my heart to be at ease. But, alas! I soon found that Theodosius was dearer to me than I imagined. Yet even with this conviction, by the united influences of pride, and fear, and shame, my natural attachments to him were overborne; and, without consulting either my happiness or my inclination, I had the infatuation to acquiesce with that proposal of my father which banished Theodosius.

This was the most culpable circumstance of my life; a fault which indeed brought its punishment along with it, and for which the miseries of one period, and the penitence of another, have, I hope, made an adequate atonement.

The years that passed between that event and my admission into this holy retreat, were miserably worn away between the languor of melancholy, and the acuteness of grief: yet that plaintive and unresigned state of mind was not, I trust, accompanied with any great degree of guilt, since it was not at the dispensations of Providence that I murmured, but at the supposed consequences of my own folly. That I refused with resolute indignation the man, to whom, before, I had been so weak as not to deny my hand, was not enough to make satisfaction to my own heart. While I considered Theodosius as dead, and myself as in some measure the cause of his death, between the grief of affection, and the inquietude of conscience, I was at length reduced to the most pitiable state both of body and mind;

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the one emaciated with sorrow and watching, and the faculties of the other almost sunk in stupefaction.

Great distresses are the spectres of the mind, and, as it is fabled of the ghosts of self-murdered bodies, they hover over the scene where their object is intombed. Business and amusement, society and solitude, were alike impressed with the image of Theodosius: the painful idea pursued me through every avocation, nor could I find a retreat from it in the bosom of friendship. The sympathizing heart of my Sophia added new softness to my own, and the tenderness of her friendship made me feel more sensibly the loss of Theodosius.

At last that dear lamented friend, with some few more that pitied and regarded me, applied to my father for his permission that I might retire into a convent. Their generosity procured me what the voice of nature and the tears of duty had solicited in vain; and, by the irresistible offer of discharging the fees of my admission, they prevailed on the father of Constantia, that she might be permitted to take the veil.

Since I entered upon the conventual life, my conduct has been too well known to you, if not to need an apology, at least to be enlarged upon here. But after those aspirations of gratitude that rise to heaven, after those truly grateful sentiments which I must ever entertain for those beneficent friends who procured my establishment in this place, what words shall I find expressive of that gratitude which is due to Father Francis?—that tender, that affectionate father, who has nursed my mind with those paternal assiduities, which were somewhat above the most perfect nature of man, which could only flow from a heart where human sensibility was exalted and refined by the immortal graces, and where God himself elevated and expanded that philanthropy which he loves.

To the ever-venerable Father Francis I owe the greatest moral blessings that are attainable in this world—peace of conscience, and rectitude of reason. For the recovery of the first, indeed, little more was necessary than the certainty that Theodosius was alive and happy; but the consolations of the father add-

ed to the presence of the friend, replaced that quiet in my heart to which it had been so long a stranger. Those consolations, however, were not more soothing than the lessons that attended them were instructive. While from those I derived content and comfort, from these I received the lights of truth and reason, and was taught to look up with an intelligent adoration to that Being whose essence is Goodness and Wisdom. From the consideration of these distinguishing attributes, whenever he shall resume that life which he gave me, I shall resign it into his hands without sorrow, and without fear.

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With difficulty I had written thus far, when the importunity of my disorder obliged me to lay down the pen. I have now resumed it, and will bear it as long as I am able; for while I hold but even an ideal conversation with you, the sense of pain is suspended. Other than bodily pain I have none. The presumption with which my apology concluded, I find, was not vain. I am perfectly indifferent to the approach of death, and agreeably to the kind wish with which you once\* concluded a letter, I trust that 'my spirit shall quit, without a sigh, the frame that confines it.'

To you, my dearest friend, my most venerable father, loved by every dear, and respected by every sacred name, to you, under the gracious appointments of Providence, I owe this happy serenity. By giving me proper ideas of the Author of Nature, and the obligations of his creatures, you have taught me to look on death as one of his best gifts, and on all beyond it without any apprehension.

Behold here the reward of your pious labours! Behold with pleasure the resignation of a mind that you strengthened, of a heart that you armed against yourself.

'My heart was grieved, and it went even through my reins.

'So foolish was I and ignorant, even as it were an irrational creature before thee.

'Nevertheless I am always by thee, for thou hast holden me by my right-hand.

\* This last letter of Constantia, and the answer of Theodosius, seem to have been written some years after the preceding letters.

Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and after that receive me in glory.

Whom *shall* I have in heaven but thee, for there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee?

My flesh, and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!

And now, dearest, and most revered of men, farewell! Whether we shall meet again in any future allotment of being, is amongst the sacred counsel of Providence. I trust we shall. Till then indulge one tender farewell from your Constantia! accept one pious, one grateful adieu, from

CONSTANCE,

#### LETTER XVIII.

##### THEODOSIUS TO CONSTANTIA.

LET not my Constantia be alarmed when she sees that this letter is written by another hand. Let not that fortitude with which she has so greatly supported her own sufferings, be dissolved in weakness for her friend; nor that noble tranquillity, with which she beholds the approach of death, be disturbed, when she is told that his hand is on Theodosius. I doubt not that the Eternal Providence, who, in his wisdom, interwove the interests and the passions of our lives, has, in his goodness, determined that they shall close together. If this be one of his gracious dispensations, I receive it not only with submission, but with gratitude. What more could I desire of the Divine Beneficence, than that, delivered from this prison of earth, I might accompany the spirit of my Constantia to the regions of everlasting happiness, to some more perfect appointment in the scale of being, where the immortal faculties shall be refined from human frailty, and where the powers of the soul shall be expanded by a nearer approach to that Perfection from which they are derived. Animated with hopes, and supported by sentiments like these, let us wait without fear the approach of Death, and receive him gladly, because he *cometh as a friend*. Indulge, my Constantia, the pleasing hope that our souls will know each other in their future allotment. The pure attachments of love and friend-

ship, founded upon and supported by esteem, may last beyond the grave, because they have their existence in the soul. And will not that Being, whose essence is love, support and cherish those connections which are agreeable to his commands, and those sentiments which are congenial with his own Divine Nature? Will he, who commanded us to *love one another*, extinguish in the grave those virtuous affections, which, when living, it was our duty to cultivate? It is not improbable that our happiness in heaven may, in some measure, consist in the harmonious intercourse of a perfect society; for I have no idea of a solitary happiness, even in the regions of perfection. Moreover, from what little accounts we find of the angelick state in the sacred writings, we see that the ideas of association and intercourse are always annexed to them. If then it is not to be doubted that in our future state we shall associate with some order of beings, can any thing be more probable than that we should mix with those kindred and congenial spirits, who, like ourselves, have had their appointments on earth, whether in different times and places, or the same? If in the same, which is still probable, and if the identity of our spiritual natures cannot be destroyed, why should not the characteristics of the soul be known in heaven as well as upon earth? I am willing to believe, at least, that the Eternal Goodness will permit this future knowledge; and though we know too little of the state of spirits to conceive the mode of their future communication, yet this we know, that it is in the power of God to permit what we wish for, and I trust that, in his kindness, he will permit it.

Then, my Constantia! for that state of exalted friendship, where the fears and frailties of mortality shall be known no more! for that happy intercourse of spiritual pleasures, which shall be no longer subject to the influences of chance or time; which shall neither be oppressed by languor, nor disturbed by anxiety! Compared with that ineffable complacency, that sublime delight, which even the hope alone of these things inspires, what are the sufferings, however peculiar, that we have hitherto endured? Were there, indeed, no future state of being to commence after this, who would not wish to be thus agreeably

ably deceived? Who would not wish to triumph over those gloomy apprehensions, which the thought of annihilation must necessarily create, in a being to whom nature has given the love of existence?

But if the foretaste of future happiness be so great; if, when only contemplated through the imperfect medium of human imagination, it is capable of inspiring such exalted delight, how inconceivably great must the real and perfect enjoyment be! Let us here, my Constantia, indulge the utmost stretch of hope; whatever an Almighty and all-beneficent Being can give, and whatever our glorified faculties can receive, let us suppose our own. He that giveth not of his Spirit by measure, he that openeth his hand, and shutteth it not again, shall not he freely give us all things?

When I consider the wisdom and benevolence of that Almighty Being, through whose kindness I have hitherto been supported in life, like my Constantia, I can walk without trembling through the dark valley of the shadow of death. And whence, but from the same consideration, could your tender

and apprehensive heart derive that more than manly firmness which is visible in your letter? That information which you so kindly ascribe to my instructions, you have drawn from your own experience of the wisdom and the goodness of Providence; to whom your gratitude is due for the rectitude of reason, as well as for every other blessing you enjoy.

I will now no longer withhold your mind from the meditation of that glorious Being, whose more visible favours we shall shortly obtain. Indeed, my faculties are already too much confused for regular thinking; and death, I find, makes hasty paces towards me. Accept my last blessing.

' Bless, O God! O Father of Nature, bless my Constantia! support her gentle spirit under the conflict of death! and lead her by the light of thy countenance to thy everlasting rest!'

And now—Oh! now—farewel, my Constantia!—my Constance! my sister! my friend! By every dear, and every holy name—farewel! I have conversed with you till the last moment.—But,—but we shall meet again. Adieu!

